ART AND MRS. BOTTLE;
OR, THE RETURN OF THE PURITAN

By the same author :

THIS WOMAN BUSINESS

A MAN WITH RED HAIR
(from the novel by Hugh Walpole)

MUD AND TREACLE

MRS. MOONLIGHT

THE DEVIL

TOPAZE
(from the French of Marcel Pagnol)

ART AND MRS. BOTTLE;
OR, THE RETURN OF THE PURITAN

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

BENN W. LEVY

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13th of September, 1929.

My dear Stephen, Jeremy and even Humphrey,

I should like to dedicate a play to you and to do so, moreover, before you are old enough to criticise or resent it. I choose this one since the problems that it tackles are, after all, not much more than a dozen years beyond you. Already one little fool of you betrays an incipient veneration for mere beauty, just as another exhibits a light-hearted tendency towards violence and crime. But whether or not one of you should eventually mature (as your grandfather predicts) into a murderer, another (as your mother fears) into an artist, and a third (as I, for the moral credit of our family, pray) into a plumber, you will all of you, I suppose, sooner or later degenerate into lovers—even if from now onwards your at present diminutive noses should be daily rubbed into the plays of

Your affectionate uncle,

Benn.

39, Hyde Park Gate,
S.W. 7.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

(in the order of their first appearance)

MICHAEL BOTTLE

JUDY BOTTLE

SONIA TIPPET

A PARLOURMAID

GEORGE BOTTLE

CELIA BOTTLE

CHARLIE DAWES

MAX LIGHTLY

The play was first publicly performed on October 21, 1929, at the Empire Theatre, Southampton, and subsequently on November 12, at the Criterion Theatre, London, with the following cast :

MICHAEL BOTTLE	ESMOND KNIGHT
JUDY BOTTLE	BETTY STOCKFELD
SONIA TIPPET	JOAN BARRY
A PARLOURMAID	LENA ANDERSON
GEORGE BOTTLE	FREDERICK LLOYD
CELIA BOTTLE	IRENE VANBRUGH
CHARLIE DAWES	JAMES CORTLAND
MAX LIGHTLY	ROBERT LORAINE

ACT I

The "studio" of the young Bottles on a spring afternoon. It is in reality the basement room of a large conventional terrace house in a quiet conventional neighbourhood, but the floor of this basement is only three or four feet below street level, as a considerable flight of stone steps (of which a glimpse can be seen through the windows) leads from street to front door. These windows, which happily face north, are large, so that the room is light enough.

The studio at once tells us a little about the young Bottles. Its untidiness has the air of being, if not exactly studied, at least tolerably welcome and the bourgeois-bohemian hybridness of its occupants is proclaimed by a heterogeneity of furniture that includes a packing-case, a smart brocade arm-chair that is clearly overflow from the drawing-room above, and a horse-hair mahogany sofa of the Recamier pattern that is clearly overflow from the servants' hall next door.

One wall still bears traces of the old faded shiny yellow patterned wallpaper that prevailed before conversion took place and on another is an unfinished mural decoration, in the modern manner, of ladies shopping. The pictures include an original charcoal sketch of a man's head and reproductions of a Matisse drawing and of Frith's Derby Day (for young artists, you know, have a sense of humour). There is also a plaster cast of a small Mestrovich statue. The room contains two doors, of which one, higher than the floor by two steps, leads to the passage outside and

the other, slightly smaller, to a little inner room that is used, by virtue of a sink and a gas-ring in it, partly as a pantry and partly as a dressing-room for models.

MICHAEL BOTTLE *is twenty, spectacled, not very powerful of physique, with just the hint of a stammer when he speaks (though it is not unattractive) and very considerable but unconscious charm when he smiles. His sister,* JUDY, *a year older, is a good-looking girl with the enormous advantage of not being hampered by too much sense of humour in the important business of knowing her own mind. Her clothes and coiffure are severe, fanciful rather than fashionable, and extremely becoming. At present she wears a bright-coloured overall. That* MICHAEL *is less heedful of his appearance we conclude from the large safety pin that precariously bridges a breach in his worn braces, conspicuous just now, since he is working without coat and waistcoat. He is painting;* JUDY *is drawing. We cannot judge their work, for their easels are turned from us.*

Of MISS SONIA TIPPET, *their present model, we have also a restricted vision so long as she too, though nearer to us, presents us with her back. Mounted on a shallow movable little platform, she is sitting very still in a dressing gown of* JUDY'S, *her ankles arranged to cross each other, her hands resting on the seat each side of her so that her arms, unbent, form a triangle of which her head is apex. Her hair, blonde and constrained into small "permanent" waves, is very fluffed over her ears. As her head is turned full over one shoulder, we may assume from her short-featured profile that, unlike the majority of her colleagues, she is, in an undistinguished fashion, extremely pretty.*

For a considerable while they work in silence.

MICHAEL (*quietly*): Damn! (*After a time he adds, talking to himself*) Promising young artist makes a hash of lady's right knee. (*Silence again for some moments.*) Promising young artist m-makes a hash of lady's left knee.

JUDY: Do you mind turning your head just a shade away from me?

The model does so and, save for the rub of his brush on the coarse canvas, there is once more no sound until MICHAEL *murmurs to himself.*

MICHAEL: Promising young artist makes a h-hash of lady's stomach.

SONIA (*smiling*): Oh, I'm sure you haven't really. (*Her diction, reacting from its native cockney, minces a little.*)

JUDY: Your head, Miss Tippet; do you mind?

SONIA: So sorry. (*Another silence.*)

MICHAEL: F-f-f- (*Then, too preoccupied to make the effort, he gives it up temporarily. At length*) F-fat-headed young artist ceases to p-promise at all.

SONIA: I don't think I've moved, have I?

MICHAEL (*after a long pause, her words having reached him merely as an empty echo*): I don't think I've . . . (*Two slow brush-strokes*) moved have I. Moved have I. . . . Moved have I. (*Then as he works, frowning at the canvas*)

She moved and ere the bus could stop
The sword had fallen neck and crop
Kerlump kerloo, kerloo kerlop
She moved and ere the bus . . .

(*He smooths some paint with his little finger*) could stop.

JUDY (*as she makes a measurement with one eye closed and her pencil at arm's length*): I don't know how you can expect to work while you're chattering all the time.

MICHAEL (*automatically and without giving any of his attention*) : Chattering all the . . . all the time.

SONIA (*without moving*) : You'd be surprised : quite a lot of artists I sit to do talk like that while they work. (*There is no response.*) You'd be surprised.

MICHAEL (*absently humming the old song*) :

He isn't much in a crowd
But if you get him alone
You'd be surprised.

SONIA : Mr. Lightly does for one.

MICHAEL : What does Mr. Lightly do for one ?

SONIA : Talks and sings for one.

MICHAEL : For one what ?

SONIA : For one thing. *You* know.

MICHAEL (*still miles away*) : Yes, I know.

JUDY : It's no good talking to Michael ; he's not listening to a word you say. Tell me, what's Mr. Lightly like to sit to ?

SONIA : Oh, he's perfectly nice really ; whatever people say. At least he always is with me.

JUDY : People love to make scandal about anyone who's really great.

SONIA : That's what I always say.

JUDY : Your head, please ; do you mind ?

SONIA : So sorry.

JUDY : Thank you. (*They work on a little while in silence.*) I suppose you have some rather tiresome moments with some people all the same.

SONIA : Oh, it's not so bad really, you know. You've only just got to appeal to their better nature. That never fails. Quite often they burst into tears. You'd be surprised. It even works with Mr. Lightly.

JUDY (*a little coldly*) : What do you mean by " even with Mr. Lightly ? "

SONIA : Well, you know he *has* got that reputation.

JUDY : I don't judge people by their reputations.

SONIA : Of course I don't really know him very well. I never sat to him till a week or two back.

Again silence for some little while.

JUDY : Did he ever happen to mention *us ?*

SONIA : Who ?

JUDY : Mr. Lightly.

SONIA : I think I *did* say I'd been working here.

JUDY : What did *he* say ?

SONIA : He said your brother was very promising, the most promising young painter he knew.

JUDY : Did he ? (*She draws on.*) Did he say anything about me ?

SONIA : He said something about your being ever so nice-looking.

JUDY *cannot continue even the pretence of working now.*

JUDY (*her eyes beaming*) : Were those his exact words ?

SONIA : Well, I don't remember his exact words.

JUDY (*bubbling over*) : Did he ever tell you how first we met ? It was really quite romantic.

SONIA : I don't think he did.

JUDY : I sent him a drawing of mine and asked him to criticize it.

SONIA : It was rather a compliment that he should have done, wasn't it ? I expect ever so many people *ask* him to.

MICHAEL : For the first six weeks there was no reply. Then I followed it up with a photograph.

SONIA : Of one of your sister's pictures ?

MICHAEL: No. Of my sister. Then a criticism arrived by return of post.

SONIA: Well now! Did you ever!

JUDY: Michael, that's not fair. You know he explained that he'd been busy. (*Throwing down her pencil*) Oh, I can't work any more. Let's have tea. Don't you want a rest, Miss Tippet?

SONIA: No, I'm all right for a bit, thanks.

JUDY: Well, I'm going to make tea.

And she goes off into the little room whence presently we hear the intermittent clatter of cups and the sound of water poured into an empty kettle. MICHAEL *continues to work in silence; then with sudden impatience he scrabbles his brush destructively all over the canvas.*

SONIA: Oh, Mr. Bottle! What a shame!

MICHAEL: Go on: you'd better have a rest. I can't work any more either.

SONIA: Why ever not?

MICHAEL (*lounging despondently across to the window*): It's rotten.

SONIA: Well, you know what I always say: if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. (*She pulls Judy's dressing gown about her.*)

MICHAEL (*with suppressed emotion*): Sonia, you're—you're wonderful.

SONIA (*pleased and surprised*): What *do* you mean?

MICHAEL (*very seriously*): I mean—that any m-minute you may have to appeal to my better nature.

SONIA: Oh, Mr. Bottle!

MICHAEL: You see, I do love you most—most frightfully.

SONIA: Oh, Mr. Bottle!

MICHAEL : I suppose you guessed ?

SONIA : No, I never ; really.

MICHAEL : I hope you don't think it b-beastly of me to tell you. I—I just couldn't help it any longer.

SONIA : I'm sure there's no harm. Sticks and stones may break my bones, words will *never* hurt me. That's what I always say.

MICHAEL : By God, how right you are ! (*He crosses and sits on the platform by her feet.*) I say, do you—do you like *me* at all ?

SONIA : Well, of course I must admit I do *like* you but——

MICHAEL : Oh, Sonia ! You are an angel, my dear. It's so marvellous to find someone who's not afraid to be quite candid.

SONIA : I always think it's so much better to be frank, don't you ? That's what I *always* think. Mind you, of course I don't say I love you.

MICHAEL : Heavens, I don't expect you do.

SONIA : Of course I think you're ever such a nice boy, but I haven't known you very long, have I ?

MICHAEL : No, I suppose I'm rather quick to take impressions. I s-so soon realized what you were : your quick sympathy and capacity for understanding. And your wonderful—kind of simple wisdom.

SONIA (*modestly*) : Oh, I don't know.

MICHAEL : And then your delicious sense of humour.

SONIA (*humourlessly*) : Of course I do think a sense of humour is everything. That's what I always say. I mean, don't you think it is ?

MICHAEL (*earnestly*) : A-absolutely. Fancy you're not knowing what I felt.

SONIA : No, really I never.

MICHAEL : You see, that's why I can't paint you. I don't really concentrate. I can't think what I'm doing.

SONIA : Quite ; and I'm sure one must think what one's doing in a thing like painting. I mean, mustn't one ? Does your sister know ?

MICHAEL : About me—and you ?

SONIA : Well, yes.

MICHAEL : Yes, she knows. I told her yesterday.

SONIA : What did she say ?

MICHAEL : She just w-wished me luck.

JUDY *returns with a tray bearing a teapot, jug and sugar-basin, a tin of mixed biscuits, two unmatched cups and a tumbler, the irregularity being less a necessity than a tribute to Art.*

JUDY : Tea. (*She sets it on the packing case.*)

SONIA : Isn't it a lovely day ? It almost seems a crime to be indoors. You know what I mean ?

JUDY : It is, isn't it ? Sugar ?

SONIA : Yes, please.

MICHAEL *hands her the biscuit-tin.*

SONIA : No, I'm not a bit hungry, thanks ever so.

MICHAEL : Perhaps you'd rather have some toast ?

SONIA : No, really ; thanks ever so.

JUDY : Are you still sitting for Mr. Lightly ?

SONIA : Well, he *may* want me again. He hasn't finished the picture but I don't think he cares for it.

MICHAEL : What is it ? A head ?

SONIA : No, it's a full-length portrait really. As a matter of fact it's back view. Ever such a funny picture. I don't like it myself. He says he's going to call it " Leaving Waterloo Station."

There is a knock at the door.

MICHAEL : Who's that ?

A VOICE : It's a telegram, Mr. Michael.

JUDY : You can come in.

A PARLOURMAID *opens the door.*

MICHAEL (*going to meet her*) : For me ?

THE PARLOURMAID : Well, I don't exactly know.

MICHAEL (*as he takes it*) : Thank you, Parsons. (*She goes.*) That's funny. (*For he has read the envelope.*)

JUDY : Who's it for ?

MICHAEL : It's just addressed to The Bottles. (*He opens it.*)

JUDY : Someone being funny. What does it say ?

MICHAEL : " Arriving any minute—Celia Bottle."

There is a short silence of incomprehension.

JUDY : Here, let's have a look. (*He gives it to her and she reads.*) Who on earth is Celia Bottle ?

MICHAEL : I don't know.

SONIA : Perhaps it's a sister.

JUDY : But I haven't got a sister—unless father's been very deceitful all these years.

SONIA : I mean a sister of your father's.

MICHAEL : What would father want with a sister at his time of life ?

JUDY : Aunt Celia ? (*To* MICHAEL) Do you think it *could* be ?

MICHAEL : But why should we never have been told about her ?

JUDY : Perhaps she's a scarlet aunt : someone not to be spoken about.

MICHAEL : It's certainly time our respectable family threw up a family skeleton somewhere.

JUDY (*suddenly*) : Michael ! (*He looks up.*) Do you know what your mother's name was ?

MICHAEL : I think I *did* know once. I can't say I remember.

JUDY : *I* remember. I'm almost certain. It was Celia.

MICHAEL : Are you sure ?

JUDY : Almost sure.

MICHAEL : Even so, that hardly simplifies matters.

SONIA : Oh, but it does, doesn't it ?

MICHAEL : Not altogether. You see my m-mother died when I was about eighteen months old.

JUDY : It must be an impostor.

MICHAEL : Or someone trying to be f—f—humorous.

JUDY : Perhaps father will have some idea. More tea, Miss Tippet ?

SONIA : No, thanks ever so. I'm quite ready to go on if you are.

MICHAEL : I don't want to go on. I've chucked it.

JUDY : Well, I haven't. You shouldn't confuse laziness with temperament. (*She goes to her easel and* SONIA, *discarding the dressing-gown, resumes her pose.*) Head just a little away, do you mind. Thank you.

MICHAEL *strolls moodily across to the window and stands there looking out in glum silence. Presently the door is opened violently and* GEORGE BOTTLE *bursts in. He catches a brief glimpse of the model.*

GEORGE (*in immediate confusion*) : Oh—oh——

And just as precipitately he retreats. Hurriedly SONIA *gathers the wrap about her.*

MICHAEL : I say, Sonia, I'm terribly sorry.

SONIA : Oh, it's quite all right.

JUDY (*at the door calling*) : Father, come on. It's all right now.

GEORGE (*audible but not visible*) : Come upstairs. I want to speak to you both.

JUDY : No, come down here. We'll give you tea. We've finished really. It's quite all right.

So rather gingerly he re-appears. He is a middle-aged, comfortable-looking man circumspectly dressed and with a serious circumspect manner. His daughter kisses him and shuts the door behind him.

GEORGE (*to* SONIA, *with a gravity that conceals his shyness of her*) : Good afternoon.

SONIA : Good afternoon.

JUDY : Tea, father ? You're home early.

GEORGE (*with a touch of pride*) : I'm rather worried. I've come home specially to speak to you both on a very serious matter.

JUDY : What fun. Tea ?

GEORGE : No, thank you. This is hardly the time to drink tea.

SONIA (*to* JUDY) : Perhaps you won't really need me any more to-day ?

JUDY : It rather looks as if we shan't, I'm afraid.

SONIA : Then I'll just go in and dress.

MICHAEL (*going to open the pantry-dressing-room door for her*) : You've got everything you want, haven't you ?

SONIA : Yes, everything, thanks ever so.

GEORGE *rises ceremoniously while she goes.*

GEORGE (*his voice lowered discreetly*) : Is that door shut ?

MICHAEL : It is. Do you want to go in ?

GEORGE : Michael, I beg you not to be jocular this

afternoon. I have a lot to tell you so you had better sit down. Judy, sit down. (*They do so. And* GEORGE *paces in silent concern for a while.*) I shall try not to upset you ; I *hope* I will not upset you. I shall try to keep myself well under control, to preserve at least an appearance of calm even though the heavens may seem to darken and totter. Don't let me frighten you. This will probably be the most terrible moment in your lives. Don't be alarmed. The power of human endurance is a very remarkable thing. Calamities befall us but somehow we continue to eat, sleep, wash and work as usual.

JUDY (*clutching at* MICHAEL'S *wrist*) : Father !

GEORGE : Now, Judy, you are letting yourself get excited already. That won't do.

JUDY : But, father, it's the suspense.

GEORGE : You must try and be patient. What I have said is merely in order that you should not be frightened. I am a direct man of few words so I know no other way than to tell you without preamble. What I have to tell you is this. Your dead mother—your—that is—how shall I put it ?

JUDY : Oh, father, do be quick.

GEORGE : Your dead mother—well, she's not dead. (*A pause.*)

MICHAEL : Father !

GEORGE (*with the slightest tinge of impatience*) : Michael it's no use your reproaching *me*.

MICHAEL : I wasn't reproaching you. But I h-had to say something.

GEORGE : Well, it doesn't help things to keep on saying " Father."

JUDY : You mean she's alive ?

GEORGE : I said she was not dead. Do you know a third alternative ?

MICHAEL : But what have you done with her all these years ?

GEORGE : I haven't done anything with her.

JUDY : Then where is she ?

GEORGE : I should think very probably on her way here.

JUDY : Michael, the telegram. Celia Bottle. I told you.

GEORGE : What telegram ? Show me.

MICHAEL : It just arrived. (*He hands it to his father, who reads it.*)

GEORGE (*snorting*) : Hm. I'm not surprised. I received a duplicate at my office. " Arriving any minute ! " How like your mother ! As if I don't see through it ! I know what was in her mind. If she'd written or telephoned, I should have had the chance to put her off. But, as it is, I'm helpless, defenceless. That's what she intended. Of course she won't admit it. But do you think I don't know my own wife ? Do you ? Why don't you answer instead of sitting there like a couple of stuffed dummies ?

JUDY : I thought your question was rhetorical, father.

MICHAEL : But why should you want to put her off ? Don't you *want* to see her ? After all these years ?

GEORGE : *Want* to ? *Want* to ? Are you off your head ? How could I *want* to see my wife ?

MICHAEL : Have you done something you oughn't to have done ?

JUDY : You can tell us, father. We'd understand.

GEORGE : Idiots, of course I've never in my life done anything I ought not to have done. It's your mother.

MICHAEL : Father, if you'd only tell us the whole story, we should be less likely to misunderstand you.

GEORGE : I am endeavouring to tell you the whole story, if you would only be kind enough not to interrupt. This is a painful subject for me, but I shall not shirk. It is for you at your ages, I'm afraid, an extremely sordid subject ; but you must face it. I had hoped never to have had to speak to you about it, but your mother has forced my hand. However, you are both more than twenty now and sooner or later you will have to learn a little about the uglier side of life. It is not a pleasant task for a father to sully the minds of his own children, to destroy their innocence beyond repair and you must realize——

JUDY : Oh, father, do come to the point.

GEORGE : The point is this. When we had been married exactly three years, your mother left me. (*There is a silence. He walks up and down.*) You may find it hard to believe, but it is true. There are, as you will one day have to learn, women *like* that.

MICHAEL : Women like what ?

GEORGE : I entreat you, Michael, not to make a difficult subject more difficult still through your thick-headedness. You were only eighteen months at the time and naturally could not be expected to understand then. But now that you're twenty, surely you must have discovered a *little* about the seamier side of life. Or why did I spend my good money sending you to a public school ? Kindly pull yourself together.

JUDY : But why did she leave you ?

GEORGE : I have asked myself that question for

nearly twenty years but can find no conceivable reason. When not actually at work, I was with her every minute of the night and day. *I* never neglected her. I was most careful that she should never be left for a moment to herself. She had everything that money and affection could give. I solemnly assure you I treated her like—like a pampered lap-dog ; no less. And that was my return. I used never to think or talk business except at the office. At home I was consistently, untiringly, *conscientiously* playful. I did everything I could to please her. Why, I never so much as treated her like a grown-up person at all. I even went the length of addressing her as—as Tiddlums.

JUDY : As what ?

GEORGE : As Tiddlums. But for all the reward I got I might just as well never have made a study of women at all. Off she went just the same.

MICHAEL : Did she go off alone ?

GEORGE : Michael, *you're* trying to irritate me on purpose. Of course she didn't go off alone. She took someone to look after her. An unprotected woman of twenty-two wandering about Europe alone indeed !

MICHAEL : You mean she took a maid ?

GEORGE : Michael, if you don't stop this, I shall send you out of the room. Either you're a fool or you're so innocent that you've no right to mix in decent society. Your mother took a friend ; a man.

JUDY : You mean a lover ?

GEORGE : There's no need to be coarse, Judy. We understand each other perfectly well without that.

MICHAEL : What was he like ?

GEORGE (*disgusted*) : I'm afraid I haven't kept his

photograph or I could have satisfied your prurient curiosity.

MICHAEL : I don't mean what did he look like. But don't you know anything about him ? Was he a c-count or a coachman ?

GEORGE : He was a down-at-heel painter. Rather what you might be, Michael, without an indulgent father.

JUDY (*her eyes sparkling*) : I say, it was really rather romantic, wasn't it ?

GEORGE : I am afraid that that is not exactly how it presented itself to me. No doubt that was how it appeared to your mother. He was an artist. I was only a sanitary engineer. Of course there could be nothing romantic about a sanitary engineer. Your mother never learnt to regard my profession as anything but a slightly improper joke. Naturally when what she called a creative worker came along *I* stood no chance.

MICHAEL : Of course it must have been d-dreadful for you.

JUDY (*still a little carried away*) : But how did it all happen ? I mean, how did it come about ? Did she leave a note on her pin-cushion or what ?

GEORGE (*seriously*) : No, she did not. Your mother never could do anything properly, like anyone else.

JUDY : What did she do ?

GEORGE : She had us both to tea.

MICHAEL : What for ?

GEORGE : To talk it over. Your mother had a passion for what she called " thrashing things out " or " getting to the bottom of things." She never *would* rest until everyone knew without chance of mis-

understanding precisely what was in everyone else's mind. Naturally the consequences were often extremely serious.

JUDY : What happened at the tea-party ?

GEORGE : That tea-party, Judy, is something that even now I cannot recall without shame and mortification. Your mother was so insufferably honest and straightforward that before we knew where we were, we found ourselves calmly and seriously discussing subjects that ought never even to be mentioned in decent society except by way of a joke.

JUDY (*involuntarily*) : Oh, I wish I'd been there.

GEORGE : I'm sorry we omitted to call you down.

MICHAEL : But hadn't our mother any hesitation about leaving *us ?*

GEORGE : I hate to say anything against the—the—against the departed, but maternal affection was not Celia's strongest point.

MICHAEL : Nor conjugal affection either apparently. I think it was a damn shame.

GEORGE : Perhaps it's only fair to tell you that she was not much more than eighteen when she married me. Her parents were old-fashioned people who " arranged " a marriage for their daughter in the old-fashioned way. Indeed she hardly knew me before our honeymoon.

JUDY : And, like all marriages of convenience, it was convenient for nobody.

MICHAEL : Did you divorce her ?

GEORGE : My father did not believe in divorce.

JUDY : But didn't she want a divorce ?

GEORGE : She wrote once after three or four months. That was the only letter I ever had from her.

JUDY: Asking to be divorced?

GEORGE: Yes, among other things.

MICHAEL: What did you answer?

GEORGE: I didn't answer. I was thinking what to say and talking it over with my father, when something else happened.

JUDY: What?

GEORGE: I heard about six weeks later that she was no longer with her painter.

MICHAEL (*bitterly*): Not enough money, I suppose!

JUDY: Michael, don't be beastly. Perhaps she didn't love him any longer.

MICHAEL: What happened then?

GEORGE: For two years I heard nothing. Then a man I know who'd been wintering at Spa told me he'd seen her there and that she was very friendly with Prince Nicholas Khostov. When I say friendly, I mean—I mean——

JUDY: You mean she was his mistress.

GEORGE: Thank you, Judy, for your delicate assistance.

MICHAEL: Khostov? Wasn't that the chap that died the other day?

GEORGE: That *was* the chap. I believe your mother was friendly with him until he died.

MICHAEL: And now, I suppose, she's on her beam-ends again; hence "arriving any minute."

JUDY: I can't see why you should be so spiteful about it all. You've never even met the woman.

MICHAEL: I'm not spiteful. It's merely that I think father had a pretty rotten deal.

SONIA *opens the door.*

SONIA : May I come in ? (*Save for her hat and gloves, which lie upon a chair, she is now dressed.*)

MICHAEL : Yes, of course come in. (*He rises to meet her, beaming.*) Let's see now : where's your hat ?

SONIA : By the easel. I'll get it, thank you. (*But* MICHAEL *fetches it for her together with her gloves.* Thank you. Shall you be wanting me to-morrow, Miss Bottle ?

JUDY : Do you, Michael ? I shall. Say half-past ten. Is that all right ?

SONIA (*drawing on her gloves*) : Yes, half-past ten's fine. (*They are on. There is a pause.*) Well, I must be going.

Another pause. MICHAEL *is a little ill at ease.*

JUDY (*significantly*) : Michael.

MICHAEL : Yes, I know. (*With a glance at and away from* GEORGE) I thought perhaps—er—upstairs.

SONIA : Oh, don't come up. I know you're busy. I don't mind here at all really.

JUDY : Of course you don't. How long was it ?

SONIA : Four hours.

MICHAEL, *very red, fishes seven and six from his trouser pocket.*

MICHAEL (*to* JUDY) : Have you g-got a half-a-crown ?

JUDY : Not down here. Have you, father ?

GEORGE (*looking among his loose money*) : I've got two shillings.

SONIA : Oh, it'll be quite all right in the morning.

GEORGE (*handing it to* MICHAEL) : Here's three shillings.

MICHAEL (*almost too distressed to articulate, handing it to her*) : I-I-'m most t-t-terribly sorry.

SONIA : Why, whatever for ? I owe you sixpence. (*Delving in her bag*) I don't think I've got it.

Then the PARLOURMAID *appears at the other door.*

THE PARLOURMAID (*announcing*) : Mrs. Bottle.

The children swing round. GEORGE *starts ; his knees suddenly weakening, he gropes pathetically behind him for a chair but none is there.*

JUDY : Why didn't you show her into the drawing-room ?

THE PARLOURMAID : She said you were expecting her and she would come wherever you happened to be. She did not wish to disturb you.

GEORGE (*jerked back to indignation*) : Disturb us indeed !

But before he can continue, MRS. BOTTLE *is there. She is a woman with a quick discerning eye and an abundance of kindly, very exquisite self-assurance. She pauses, smiling, very self-possessed, rather enjoying and determined to make the most of her entrance.*

CELIA (*as the door closes behind her, with a little jerk of the head towards it*) : New parlourmaid.

GEORGE (*exploding*) : What do you suppose ?

CELIA : Dear George ! (*She goes to him and kisses him politely.*) How are you ?

GEORGE (*when he recovers powers of speech*) : How dare you kiss me !

CELIA : Well, dear, it's rather ridiculous to shake hands with one's own husband. And I'm not in the least disposed to cut you—especially in your own house. What other alternative remains ? George dear, you've been getting plump.

GEORGE : I've not been getting plump ; and kindly do not address me as George.

CELIA : Mr. Bottle has never seemed to me a very sensible thing to call anybody ; least of all one's own husband. Husbands should be treated with more respect. Now suppose you introduce me to my children.

She looks about her.

GEORGE : I am not at all convinced that I ought to.

CELIA : But surely there were only two ?

GEORGE : Don't be affected. You *know* there were only two.

CELIA : I certainly thought so. But my memory's not what it was. (*With a glance at* SONIA) That's a pretty one. Is that mine ?

GEORGE : No, it is *not* yours.

CELIA : What a pity. (*To* JUDY, *who has been staring at her in admiration*) Then *you* must be. (*She takes her hands and holds them at arm's length, while she scrutinizes her very kindly.*) I believe I'm quite a lucky woman. Nice straight back and nice straight eyes. I should say you were rather a nice person altogether, aren't you ?

JUDY (*delighted*) : I don't know ; I hope so.

CELIA : And thank God, you know how to dress yourself.

JUDY : My mother's daughter perhaps.

CELIA : Thank you, my dear.

JUDY : Anyhow this is only an old overall, so you can hardly judge.

CELIA : It's a pretty overall and *I* can judge. What's your name ? (GEORGE *makes an inarticulate sound expressive of indignation.*) I'm sorry, George, but I really have forgotten and it would be silly to guess wrong.

JUDY : Judy.

CELIA : What a stupid name. George, why ever did you ?

GEORGE : You know quite well I was against it. It was your own idea.

CELIA : Was it ? Perhaps it's not so bad. And you're Michael.

MICHAEL (*a little unfriendly*) : How do you do ?

CELIA : Very well, thank you, Michael. How are you ?

GEORGE : I congratulate you on at least remembering *his* name.

CELIA : Ah, you see I knew him longer. He's twelve months older than Judy.

GEORGE (*snappily*) : He's twelve months younger.

CELIA (*unperturbed*) : Is he ? I knew it was one or the other.

SONIA (*who has been forgotten*) : Well, I really must be getting along.

CELIA : I hope I'm not driving you away.

SONIA : No, I have to get along anyway really. Good afternoon.

CELIA : Good afternoon.

GEORGE (*without unbending*) : Good afternoon.

JUDY : Good-bye. To-morrow at ten-thirty.

SONIA : I won't forget. Good-bye.

MICHAEL : I'll see you out.

SONIA : No, you stay here. You're busy. I can look after myself.

MICHAEL : Can you ? Thanks awfully. Good-bye.

SONIA : Good-bye.

And with a smile that embraces them all she is gone. A short silence falls upon them.

CELIA : George, you're not keeping your end up.

I'm disappointed in you. Be easy. Be at home. Sit down.

GEORGE: Have you the impudence to tell me to sit down in my own house?

CELIA: You may sit down in the street, dear, if you prefer it. I had not meant to be impudent. (*Winningly*) Come; don't be childish, George. Talk to me. How's the lavatory business?

GEORGE (*aloof*): Thank you, my business still does well.

CELIA: Good. Have you taken Michael in?

GEORGE: I was anxious for Michael to join me. But he also felt himself superior to a business that concerns itself with anything so prosaic as drains.

MICHAEL: I never said that, father.

CELIA: I'm sure you didn't, Michael. What *do* you do?

MICHAEL: I'm an artist: at least I hope to be.

GEORGE: They both are.

CELIA (*her eyebrows slightly raised*): Are they? That's a little tactless of them. Yet I promise you, George, they *are* your children.

GEORGE (*sternly*): Celia! I beg of you. Are you not content to have abandoned Judy and Michael in their infancy without returning expressly to debauch them in their youth?

CELIA: You mustn't make the mistake, George, of supposing that young people nowadays have as little knowledge of the world as you and I had at their age.

GEORGE: My children have been brought up properly. I am proud to assure you that they have no knowledge of anything.

CELIA : Presumably they have some knowledge of their mother ?

GEORGE : They have ; but until this afternoon they had not. They were brought up to believe that I was a widower. I wished to spare you.

CELIA : So you killed me off. And this afternoon when the corpse showed signs of walking you told them everything.

GEORGE : As briefly as I could I told them everything.

CELIA (*quite amiably*) : And that, I suppose, is why Michael is so resentful of me.

MICHAEL (*a little disarmed by this directness*) : I'm n-not resentful of you.

CELIA (*smiling*) : Stick to your guns, Michael. You resent me very much. And quite right too. (*To* GEORGE) I hope you didn't lay it on *too* thick, dear ?

GEORGE : I stated the facts.

CELIA : Yes, they're thick enough.

JUDY : *I* don't think so.

CELIA : Don't you ? Then perhaps your father was lenient.

JUDY : I think he told us everything. You ran away from him for another man. That's all, isn't it ?

CELIA : Yes, I suppose that's all.

JUDY : Were you very much in love with him ? I mean the other man ?

CELIA : Yes, dear, very much.

JUDY (*defiantly*) : Well, I think that's all that matters.

CELIA : Do you ? That's nice of you. (*It is not a snub.*)

MICHAEL (*uneasily*) : Of course if you loved him as

much as all that—well—I suppose—well—— (*He falls silent.*)

CELIA : I loved him, I think, as much as one person can love another. We were not together very long, you know. When—when we separated, I thought my heart would break. I was in point of fact very, very unhappy for much longer than is healthy. But to my surprise (*she shrugs and smiles*) the world went on.

JUDY : Do you love him still ?

CELIA : No, my dear. Fortunately, you see, love dies.

MICHAEL : Why didn't you come back to father *then ?*

CELIA : Then ? Don't you think it's just possible that I might not have been welcome ?

GEORGE : Didn't you think that might be possible even now ?

CELIA : Yes, George ; but I am old enough now never to let my wishes be baulked by my pride. They are so much more important.

JUDY : In that case why have you never come back till now ?

CELIA : Did George mention Prince Nicholas to you ?

JUDY : Yes.

CELIA : Not many weeks ago he died. He would never allow me to make a return visit.

JUDY : Was he so nervous of losing you ?

CELIA : He was very nervous of losing his dignity.

JUDY : Were you with him long ?

CELIA : Nearly sixteen years.

JUDY : What were you called ?

CELIA : Madame Bottle. (*Whimsically*) I'm sorry, George.

JUDY : But after sixteen years ? Don't people ever call you Princess ?

CELIA : Sometimes, but only as—as a kind of discourtesy title.

GEORGE : All this is of course extremely interesting but perhaps you won't consider me unduly inquisitive if I enquire to what we owe the pleasure of this visit ?

CELIA (*amiably*) : George, don't be pompous. I came back to see the children. I also wanted to see you again.

GEORGE : About anything in particular ?

CELIA : No, dear ; only curiosity. I'm sorry to have given you so little warning but I was afraid——

GEORGE (*interrupting*) : Yes, you were afraid what ?

CELIA (*a little surprised*) : I was afraid that if I wrote or telephoned, you might have refused to see me.

GEORGE : I—I certainly should have done.

CELIA : And wouldn't that have been a pity. Michael why don't you want to go into your father's business ?

MICHAEL : I don't know ; I wanted to paint.

CELIA : Will you make any money with your painting ?

MICHAEL : Not for a long time ; p-possibly never.

CELIA : You're keen about it ?

MICHAEL : I believe it's the only thing I really am keen about ; except for—for one other thing.

CELIA : You could probably make a good deal of money in your father's business, you know ?

MICHAEL : I know and with less hard work.

JUDY : Michael is artist enough to realize that there are other things more important than money.

CELIA : You mean he is rich enough to realize that.

JUDY : I mean an artist is a servant who isn't rewarded in pounds, shillings and pence like a sanitary engineer ; probably he is never rewarded at all. He doesn't care. It is enough for him that he serves ; serves he knows not what save that it is the greatest of all masters.

GEORGE : It is enough for him that his father should be rewarded in pounds, shillings and pence. You will be pleased to find that in some ways Judy is, as she says, her mother's daughter.

CELIA : So I see, George. You needn't rub it in.

JUDY : But Michael really is incredibly good. Everyone says so. Everybody at the Slade whose opinion's worth a cuss regards Michael as their prize performer.

CELIA : Are you good too ?

MICHAEL : Of course she is.

JUDY : Oh, I'm all right. I may be quite good one day, but I'll never be absolutely first-class. I might have been if I'd been a man. Women haven't the necessary power.

CELIA : That's true ; not that kind of power.

JUDY : But Michael has. It would be criminal for him to bury himself in a dusty office, working out the bursting-point of a sewer or whatever it is.

GEORGE : Which I suppose is quite good enough for me.

JUDY : No, father ; not nearly good enough if you'd happened to be born with the capacity to do something better.

CELIA : Isn't that a little sweeping, Judy ?

JUDY : Not if you'd seen any of Michael's work. Would you like to ?

CELIA : Very much.

MICHAEL (*embarrassed*): No, there's n-nothing here worth seeing. You can see it some other time.

But JUDY *is already rummaging among the drawings in a portfolio.*

JUDY: Don't pose, Michael. You know you can draw. What's the use of pretending?

MICHAEL: I wasn't posing. It all seemed to me a little boring for—f-for—er—Mrs. Bottle; that's all.

CELIA: Mrs. Bottle has had many much more boring moments, Michael, I assure you.

JUDY (*putting one on the chair beside her while she searches for others*): Here's one that's quite amusing. You know that feeling for purely formal beauty that you get in the early Gauguins. That's what Michael sometimes gets.

CELIA (*who has a quick nose for pretentiousness, artistic or otherwise*): Does he! (*She examines the drawing.*)

JUDY: That's not one of the best but there's some quite amusing composition in it. (*Extracting another*) Oh, I'd forgotten this. Here's rather a jolly nude.

CELIA (*after a second glance of tolerant suspicion at* JUDY): Show me the jolly nude.

There is a knock at the door.

GEORGE: Come in.

The PARLOURMAID *opens the door.*

THE PARLOURMAID: Mr. Dawes has called.

JUDY: Mr. Dawes? Oh, damn. Tell him I can't see him. I'm busy.

THE PARLOURMAID: He asked to see Mr. Bottle, miss.

JUDY: To see *you*, father? Why on earth does he want to see you?

GEORGE: He made an appointment with me for five o'clock.

JUDY (*suspicious*): Father!

CELIA: Why not let him come down here?

GEORGE: I wish to speak to him in private. Thank you, Parsons; show Mr. Dawes into the drawing-room. I will be with him immediately.

THE PARLOURMAID: Yes, sir.

She withdraws.

JUDY: Father, you know perfectly well what Charlie wants to see you about. So do I.

GEORGE: You will pardon me but I know nothing of the kind. Nor can you.

JUDY: Why pretend? You *know* what he wants.

GEORGE: When you are my age, Judy, you will have learnt not to count your chickens before they're hatched.

JUDY (*impatiently*): Charlie's been hatched for months.

MICHAEL: And is just about ripe for scragging.

GEORGE (*at the door, ignoring them; to* CELIA): Will you be here when I come back?

CELIA (*decidedly*): Yes, George.

GEORGE: Oh. (*He opens his mouth to speak, then changes his mind*). Oh!

And he goes.

CELIA: Who is Charlie Dawes?

JUDY: A young oaf whose people live next door. The only remarkable thing about him is that he wants to marry me.

CELIA: I don't find it remarkable that young men should want to marry you; even young oafs. Or is it young oaves? Do you propose to marry *him?*

JUDY : I certainly do not.

CELIA : Have you told him so ?

JUDY : Well, so far he hasn't actually asked me in so many words. But he's been sniffing around me pensively for weeks. You know the kind of thing.

CELIA : Oh, I know it well ! And this afternoon, I gather, he has come to have a sniff at your father ?

JUDY : Exactly.

MICHAEL : I wish him well. (*He has been carefully filling a very new-looking pipe and has succeeded at last in lighting it only after sufficient coughing and spluttering to disturb the others.*) Are you sure you don't mind a pipe ?

CELIA : Quite sure, thank you, dear ; but I'm not sure that you don't.

MICHAEL : Oh, it's rather n-new, that's all. And new pipes are never quite the same as old ones.

CELIA : I suppose not quite.

JUDY : They tend to be newer.

CELIA : What has George to say about your suitor ?

JUDY : Father's inclination is to clutch at him like a drowning man clutches a straw. Because he doesn't want to marry me himself, he can't imagine anyone else wanting to.

CELIA : *Is* there anyone else ?

JUDY : Well, not actually wanting to marry me. But even so I don't choose to regard myself as a surplus woman at the age of twenty-one.

CELIA : I sincerely trust no daughter of mine will regard herself as a surplus woman as long as there is a single man left alive.

JUDY (*smiling*) : I promise not to betray the tradition. (*With a not disagreeable touch of impudence*) You know, Michael, I take to our mother.

CELIA : Do you, dear ? People do.

JUDY : You have a sense of humour.

CELIA : It has been suggested.

MICHAEL : Whenever you feel inclined to snub Judy, don't hesitate. She's quite used to it.

CELIA : I never snub anybody when they make it easy for me. Are you in love, Judy ?

JUDY (*seriously*) : Yes ; very much.

CELIA : Do you want to tell me about it ?

JUDY : Yes, please.

CELIA : Does Michael know ?

JUDY : Oh yes, he can stay. He knows all about it. Besides there isn't really very much to tell. I love him and—and I think he loves me.

CELIA : You *think* he does ?

JUDY : Well, I know he does really ; only it's in rather a different way, that's all.

CELIA : Which way ?

JUDY : It's rather difficult to explain. There are so *many* ways.

CELIA : Still I think I know them all.

JUDY : It sounds absurd but honestly he's not a bit an ordinary person. In the first place, he's a celebrity ; in the second place he deserves to be.

CELIA : He doesn't want to marry you ?

JUDY : Well, he's got a wife already ; at least he thinks so.

CELIA : He *thinks* so ? But isn't sure ? Why doesn't he ask someone ?

JUDY : They separated years ago and he doesn't know where she is or even if she's alive.

CELIA : Model wife. He's considerably older than you ?

JUDY: A good deal. Young men bore me.

CELIA: I dare say they will do till you're my age. You love him very much, eh?

JUDY (*in a lower voice*): Pretty thoroughly, yes. I want to live with him.

CELIA: Does he know?

JUDY: Yes, I told him so.

CELIA: What did he say?

JUDY: He's thinking it over.

CELIA (*stifling her indignation*): In view of your age?

JUDY: Heavens, no. Twenty-one isn't a baby. He's only hesitating because he's not sure whether I'd interfere with his work. You see he really is rather a great man. I don't think I *should* interfere with it. I know I shouldn't. I might even help him; not technically of course, but just by being pleasant and tactful and understanding. (*A tiny laugh.*) Doesn't that sound old-fashioned?

CELIA (*soberly*): It sounds eternal.

JUDY: Do you think I'm talking nonsense? It's funny I should have blurted all this out. I just had an instinct that you'd understand.

CELIA: I understand, my dear; everything you've said and more.

JUDY: Of course you've had such a marvellous life, you're bound to understand things easily. Mother—I say do you mind me calling you that? It seems so absurd to call you Mrs. Bottle.

CELIA (*patting her hand and smiling*): I don't mind much. What were you going to say?

JUDY: I was going to say it's funny how history repeats itself. My man's an artist too.

CELIA: Is he?

JUDY : I told you I wouldn't betray the tradition.

CELIA : It's not a very good tradition, Judy.

JUDY : Oh, you have to say that ! I'm not taken in.

CELIA : Are you happy ?

JUDY : Divinely happy. (*Then with an abrupt change of subject*) Would you like me to make you some tea ?

CELIA : Is there none left ?

JUDY : Yes, but that's cold. I'll make you some fresh. The kettle's boiling. (*She goes off into the pantry with the tea-pot.*)

MICHAEL (*after a pause, coming a little uncomfortably into the picture*) : Er—*I'm* not.

CELIA : You're not what, Michael ? Boiling ?

MICHAEL : No ; happy.

CELIA : Aren't you ? I'm sorry. Why not ?

MICHAEL : I say—I'm awfully sorry if I was—was rude to you when you first came.

CELIA : You weren't.

MICHAEL : Yes, I was. You see, I'd got it into my head that—you don't mind my saying it ?

CELIA : No, Michael.

MICHAEL : Well, that you'd g-given father rather a bad deal.

CELIA : You were quite right. I had.

MICHAEL : Oh, I know I wasn't right. It was just that I knew father and didn't know you. It's silly to judge people, because one's so often wrong.

CELIA : No, dear ; it's silly to judge people because one's so often right.

MICHAEL (*still uneasy*) : What I wanted to say is that—that there's something you ought to know ; that is, something I'd like to tell you.

CELIA : What is it ?

MICHAEL (*lamely*): Well the fact is—you see—I-I'm in love too.

CELIA: Are you, Michael?

MICHAEL: Yes. (*A pause.*) Well, there you are. That's what I wanted to say.

CELIA: I see.

MICHAEL: Now let's talk of something else.

CELIA: Very well, Michael. (*As though starting a fresh subject*) Who was that girl that was here when I arrived? (JUDY *comes back with her newly-made tea and another cup, which she fills and hands to* CELIA). You were all too fussed to introduce us.

MICHAEL (*airily*): That girl? The one who was here when you came?

CELIA: Yes, Michael.

MICHAEL: That's a girl called Sonia.

CELIA: What's her other name?

MICHAEL: Whose? Sonia's?

CELIA: Yes, Michael.

MICHAEL: Well—er—Tippet.

CELIA: Tippet.

MICHAEL (*defiantly*): Tippet.

CELIA (*a little grimly*): Miss Tippet.

JUDY: She's a model.

CELIA: So I conjectured.

JUDY: Michael's in love with her.

CELIA: So he has been attempting to tell me.

MICHAEL (*very red*): And why shouldn't I be? Is it against her that she works for her living?

CELIA: To the best of my belief I never said a word against her.

JUDY: You'll get used to Michael. He always grows pugnacious at the mention of Sonia.

CELIA (*to* MICHAEL) : What has your father got to say about it ?

MICHAEL : Nothing at p-present ; because he doesn't know.

CELIA : Does he know about *your* complications, Judy ?

JUDY : Good heavens, no. He'd have indigestion for a week.

MICHAEL : Father's awfully odd over that kind of thing. If Judy had fastened on a half-wit like Charlie Dawes, he'd have been only too pleased. But he'd be appalled to find it was someone of world-wide importance.

CELIA : Is Judy's gallant as important as all that ?

JUDY : He's the only English artist who's taken really seriously abroad. I don't see why you shouldn't know who it is. It's Max Lightly.

Slowly, automatically CELIA'S *hands, still grasping the cup and saucer, sink before her, so that the tea dribbles slowly on to the floor.*

JUDY : Mother ! Are you all right ?

CELIA (*with an effort blinking herself back to normal*) : Perfectly all right. But I never did like China tea.

CURTAIN

ACT II

About three o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, a Saturday. The Studio again. JUDY *is at her easel painting a still-life, whose objects, arranged on the seat of a chair standing on the throne, consist of a football-boot, a violin, some liquorice ribbon, a china dog and a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts.* CHARLIE DAWES, *a large, bovine young man, is wandering awkwardly about the room at the loosest of loose-ends. From time to time he comes to rest at* JUDY'S *shoulder, contemplates the picture with expressionless incomprehension and moves disconsolately on. Presently he drifts to the chair and with an idle finger flicks thoughtfully at the bottle. It is the first time that* JUDY *appears aware of him.*

JUDY: Charlie, for God's sake, be careful.

CHARLIE: Sorry.

JUDY (*when she has resumed her work*): You'd better stand on the other side of the room.

CHARLIE: I promise not to touch anything again.

JUDY (*preoccupied*): I'm not taking any chances. Sooner or later you'll trip over something and fall down. You usually do.

CHARLIE (*mildly protesting*): Really, Judy, I haven't fallen down for—for ages.

JUDY (*inattentively*): *That's* a good boy.

CHARLIE: I say, Judy, I wish you wouldn't treat me like a sort of idiot.

JUDY : It's lucky for you I do.

CHARLIE : I came up specially to see you this week-end.

JUDY : There now.

CHARLIE : One way and another I had a good deal to do. (*There is no response.*) I say, Judy, you might give me a little attention.

JUDY (*after a long pause*) : What ?

CHARLIE : I said you might give me a little of your attention.

JUDY (*making a thoughtful brush-stroke*) : I'm giving you all my attention.

CHARLIE : I'm sorry. Well, the fact is I saw your father yesterday. (*He waits for this to make some effect. It makes none, so he continues*) He was really very decent about it.

JUDY : Father may have his faults but he is consistently decent.

CHARLIE : I told him what was in my mind and—and—well, there you are. (*Another discomforting silence.*) As I say, he was extraordinarily decent about it. I mean it does make such an extraordinary difference if a girl's father takes that sort of thing in the proper spirit. (*Again he waits in vain for her to respond.*) Well, I suppose really you want to know what he said ? (*Apparently she does not.*) Of course he was a bit surprised at first.

JUDY (*absently*) : Trust father to do the thing properly.

CHARLIE : I mean he naturally wasn't prepared for what I had to say. But he took it very calmly and—and—er—was in short thoroughly decent all through. He said he didn't like the idea of losing you, but he

fully realized that children have to grow up some day. And then he said a bit that I thought was extraordinarily apt about—about skylarks and their young. That led from one thing to another; we talked a bit about the boat race and the test matches and so on, and then finally he said *he* wasn't an old-fashioned father and he wouldn't dream of doing anything further without telling you, and that the next thing, as far as he could see, was for me to ask you. Well—well, there you are.

JUDY (*concentrating intensely on her work; at last*): There you are.

CHARLIE: Well—I thought I'd drop round this afternoon to ask you. (*No answer. He coughs uneasily and adds*) To—to put the thing quite grossly. (*After another pause*) Well, there you are. What—er—what do you say?

JUDY (*sweetly, as one might to a fidgety child*): Just a moment, Charlie.

CHARLIE (*after waiting just a moment*): Well, what do you say?

JUDY: Mmm?

And then the door opens and CELIA *comes in.*

CELIA (*rather businesslike*): Good afternoon, Judy.

JUDY (*pleased and surprised*): Hullo; I didn't know you were coming.

CELIA: Your father home yet?

JUDY: No, I wasn't expecting him. He usually goes to the Club on Saturdays.

CELIA: I sent him a message, asking him to meet me here. Anybody else arrived?

JUDY: No; who do you expect?

CELIA: Who's this?

JUDY: That? That's Charlie Dawes. Why?

CELIA: So *that's* Charlie Dawes. How do you do?

CHARLIE: How do you do?

JUDY: This, Charlie, is my mother.

CHARLIE: Your mother? But I always thought you never had a mother.

CELIA: I am a comparatively recent acquisition.

CHARLIE: I'm extremely sorry, but I understood you were—er—dead.

CELIA: Not dead, Mr. Dawes; "worse than death." Sit down. (*A little bewildered he does so.*) I understand you want to marry Judy.

CHARLIE: Oh, no—really—er—not at all——

CELIA: I'm sorry. Then Judy was mistaken.

JUDY (*lightly*): *Of course* he wants to marry me.

CHARLIE: That is, I *do* want to marry her, but—but—well, it's hardly the sort of thing one wants all the world to know about.

CELIA: I wonder why it is that men are so boastful about their mistresses and so shamefaced about their wives. Nicholas was just like that. Anyhow; to business. Do you want to marry Judy or not?

CHARLIE: Well—— (*He stumbles.*) Well the—the fact is——

CELIA: Come along, my good man; do you or don't you?

CHARLIE: Well, yes.

CELIA: Good. Have you asked her?

CHARLIE: Well, yes.

CELIA: What did she say?

CHARLIE: She said—well, she said "Just a moment." I mean she was sort of busy; and—and then you came in.

CELIA (*to* JUDY) : What were you about to say—as soon as you found time ?

JUDY : I was about to say no, of course.

CELIA : Never say no in a hurry. Even the prettiest girls can say it once too often. What have you to offer, sir ?

CHARLIE : I ?

CELIA : Yes, you.

CHARLIE (*as though it were self-evident*) : Why, I'm—I'm in love with her.

CELIA : Is that the best argument you have for yourself ?

JUDY : It's not a bad one, mother.

CELIA : It's a thundering bad one. In love with her ! Are you rich, are you healthy, are you kind, are you clean ? Who cares a button about the temporary condition of your foolish heart so long as its beats are sound ? My son-in-law must face realities, young man.

CHARLIE : Well—well, I have certain private means and—and——

CELIA : How much ?

CHARLIE : About fifteen hundred a year.

CELIA : Any expectations ?

CHARLIE : Well, I'm an only child.

CELIA : What's your job ?

CHARLIE : I'm—I'm a sort of farmer.

CELIA : What do you mean by a *sort* of farmer ?

CHARLIE : Well, I *am* a farmer. I had a year's scientific training at Rothampstead and then I bought a farm in Hampshire.

CELIA : Does it shew a profit ?

CHARLIE : Not yet ; but last year it didn't shew a loss.

CELIA: How do you think Judy would like the country?

JUDY: I shouldn't mind that part of it; at least if I hadn't a job of my own.

CHARLIE: I'd thought of that and if Judy didn't like it—well, I could always give it up. Mr. Bottle said he wouldn't mind taking me into his business. You see, I first trained to be a sort of architect; (CELIA's *foot taps impatiently*),—well, an architect. And Mr. Bottle said that might come in quite useful.

CELIA: What do you say, Judy?

JUDY: Mother, you know I wouldn't think of it.

CELIA: It seems to me at least worth thinking of. He looks solid and—and strong; and he has some money and a job. And he really isn't bad-looking.

CHARLIE: Oh, I say——

CELIA: Don't interrupt. Personally I rather like him.

JUDY: I like him too; but we'd never get on together.

CELIA: Why not?

JUDY: Well, for one thing he's so slow-witted.

CELIA: I agree, but think how restful.

JUDY: Then we have no interests in common.

CELIA: A house and children are quite enough to remedy that.

JUDY: And finally I don't love him.

CELIA (*with a touch of impatience*): Child, did you hear what I said just now (*pointing with her finger*) to him?

JUDY (*not recognizing* CELIA's *seriousness*): I did, mother; but what does for Charlie won't do for me.

CELIA: Listen to me. (*But the door opens and* GEORGE *comes in.*) Ah, George; good. Come in.

GEORGE (*a little stiffly*): Good afternoon. I got your note; very inconvenient really. I was playing snooker with Marcus and Harrison and Thomas. (*And then he notices* CHARLIE.) Ah, Dawes; this is nice to see you here.

CHARLIE: Thank you, sir. I just came in to have a word with Judy.

GEORGE: Oh, yes. *I* see. (*He laughs and pats him significantly on the back.*) *I* see. Come here, Judy my dear, and kiss me again. (*Another light shoulder-clap for* CHARLIE.)

CELIA (*warningly*): That will do, George. If you want to knock Mr. Dawes about any more, you must wait until to-morrow. Now he has to go. Good-bye, Mr. Dawes. (*She offers her hand.*) We shall meet again soon.

CHARLIE: I hope so. Good-bye. Good-bye, sir.

GEORGE: Well, good-bye; if you *must* go. Judy will see you out.

CELIA (*to* JUDY): I want to speak to your father. Don't come down till I ring. I'll ring twice. You can occupy yourself for a while?

JUDY: Yes; I'm going to change.

She follows CHARLIE *out.*

CELIA: Now, George. I want to ask you some questions. First of all, what do you know about your children?

GEORGE: What do you mean? I know everything about them.

CELIA: I see. And you are quite satisfied?

GEORGE: Perfectly satisfied. Of course I'd have

liked Michael to come into my business ; but I'm not so old-fashioned as to think these things should be forced. People must follow their bent.

CELIA : Follow my foot ! And Judy ?

GEORGE : Ah, for Judy, it's different. Drawing is a perfectly—perfectly ladylike accomplishment for a young woman. It always was. Mind you, I'd rather she stuck to landscapes than—than, well what she does ; but one must move with the times.

CELIA : Judy's your favourite, isn't she ?

GEORGE (*indignant*) : Certainly not. I have no favourites. Judy's always been more reliable and less troublesome than Michael, but that's not my fault.

CELIA : I think I prefer Michael. There's a touch of intellectual arrogance about Judy that isn't pretty.

GEORGE : Celia, I don't regard that as a fit way to talk about your own daughter. If you had a proper mother's heart, Judy could commit murder and you wouldn't blame her.

CELIA : Perhaps my " mother's heart " is not quite in working order yet. But don't upset yourself, my dear ; I like 'em both. They're both better than I deserve. Judy's only young.

GEORGE : If you found fault with Michael, there would be more sense. He always *was* a nuisance.

CELIA (*smiling*) : Was he, George ? How ?

GEORGE (*with a sudden simple sincerity*) : Well, I *did* so want him to come into my business. He would have been the fourth Bottle in direct descent. You may laugh but——

CELIA : I don't laugh.

GEORGE : Of course painting's all very well but not for a man.

CELIA : Did you point that out to Michael ?

GEORGE : Again and again, but he could never see it. The boy's a fool, you know.

CELIA : Did you ask him what he'd do if you refused to support him ?

GEORGE : I did. He said he'd do the best he could. So I asked him how he would like to starve.

CELIA : What did *he* say ?

GEORGE : He said Rembrandt was frequently starving.

CELIA : What did *you* say ?

GEORGE : I said I might be an elderly man but I wasn't going to have him being rude to *me*.

CELIA : That was very quick. Are you prepared for a shock ?

GEORGE : Why ? Yes.

CELIA : Michael is in love.

GEORGE (*after a long pause of incredulity*) : You mean with—with some woman ?

CELIA : Yes, George, with a woman. Name of Tippet.

GEORGE : Name of what ?

CELIA : Tippet, Tippet, Tippet.

GEORGE (*appalled*) : But—but what Tippets are they ?

CELIA : I don't know. She's a model.

GEORGE : I don't believe it.

CELIA : Why not ?

GEORGE : Michael would never do a thing like that to *me*. Why should he ? I—I've never done *him* any harm.

CELIA : George, talk sense. This is serious.

GEORGE : Do you suppose *I* don't regard it as

serious ? Michael has never been anything to me but an annoyance and a pest. Why he can't take a little more after Judy I don't know.

CELIA : Perhaps this time that's what he's done.

GEORGE : What do you mean ?

CELIA : I mean that Judy's head over ears in love too.

GEORGE (*hoping hopelessly*) : You mean—with Charlie Dawes ?

CELIA : I mean nothing of the sort.

GEORGE : Who then ? Do you know ?

CELIA : Yes, George. (*By way of preparation*) You won't like it.

GEORGE : Who ?

CELIA : Max Lightly.

GEORGE (*all colour leaving his face*) : Not—not the man that you——— ?

CELIA : Yes, George ; the man that I.

GEORGE (*when power of speech returns*) : How—how dare he !

CELIA (*sharply*) : I don't know.

GEORGE : How do you know it's true ?

CELIA : Judy told me.

GEORGE : But—but—but———

CELIA : Yes, George ?

GEORGE : But how did they meet ?

CELIA : Judy sent him a drawing and asked him to criticise it. There was no answer, so Michael followed it up with a photograph of Judy. Then there was.

GEORGE : Michael ! Disgusting boy !

CELIA : Being abusive won't mend matters.

GEORGE : Do you expect me to be pleased ? There was I, happily playing snooker with Harrison, doing

no harm to anyone, and you calmly explode *this* at me! I knew that, as soon as you came back, there would be trouble.

CELIA: Did I bring the trouble or was it waiting for me? I turn my back for twenty years and a nice mess you're all in. It's for me to be indignant. You're not fit to be left alone. You don't *deserve* to have been left alone. Do you suppose this would have happened if, instead of me, *you'd* run off with Max and left me with the children? I wish to goodness we'd arranged it that way now.

GEORGE: Celia, is this a moment to be frivolous?

CELIA: I am feeling far from frivolous. There is an extremely difficult half-hour in front of me. I have sent for Max. He will be here any minute.

GEORGE: Celia, what are you saying? Pull yourself together.

CELIA: I am perfectly together. I sent Max a note by hand asking him to tea. I told the messenger to wait for an answer.

GEORGE: Another of your confounded tea-parties.

CELIA: Yes, another of those. What do you propose to do?

GEORGE: I shall punch him on the nose.

CELIA: That of course will solve the problem completely. (*Suddenly changing her tone*) Did you hear anything?

GEORGE: No. What?

CELIA: The front-door bell.

GEORGE: You mean—he's here?

CELIA (*for the first time ever so slightly flustered*): Yes, I expect so. I told the maid to shew him down here. George—George, I think I'd like to see him alone first.

GEORGE: You needn't bother about *me*. *I'm* not frightened of him.

CELIA: I was thinking of myself. It's surprising, but I'm nervous. The feeling's new to me. I'd rather you weren't there in case I'm not at my best.

GEORGE: Very well; if you'd rather.

CELIA: Come back in a little while; at your discretion.

He goes. Alone, with quick fluttering hands, she titivates her dress. Unexpectedly she sniffs and with an impracticable handkerchief wipes her nose. And then she powders it. She looks about her, selects a suitable chair and arranges herself with studied grace, not like her daughter's generation in it, but on it. For some moments she holds this attitude but, as MAX *still doesn't come, abandons it from fatigue. And then he comes. He is a large attractive man in his early forties, markedly but not self-consciously indifferent to good clothes, inasmuch as he has always in his work and with women been successful without them. By accident rather than design he is now wearing a stretched, misshapen tweed jacket with trousers and waistcoat of rather worn blue serge. When he sees* CELIA, *an almost imperceptible change comes over his features; but she is quick enough to observe it.*

CELIA: Do I look as old as all that, Max?

MAX: I forgot that in twenty years a girl becomes a woman.

CELIA: In less than that, Max. How clever of you to look disappointed! You see, you've put me at a disadvantage at the outset.

MAX: I'm afraid the disadvantage will be temporary. You were always quicker than I.

CELIA : I'm quicker still now. (*But for all the brave front her fingers are plucking nervily at that handkerchief.*) Your taste in clothes hasn't improved with the years, has it ?

MAX (*surprised*) : My dear Celia, this is my best suit ; unearthed especially to impress you.

CELIA : That jacket was threadbare when you first met *me*.

MAX : The jacket perhaps is not too good ; but I couldn't find the coat to match.

CELIA : You've altered less than I have. Of course you're a year or two my junior.

MAX (*politely*) : I don't think so.

CELIA : Yes, Max, you always were. So now you're a great man, eh ? (*He nods gravely.*) Do you like it ?

MAX : I like never being short of food.

CELIA : Of course you know you have a filthy reputation ?

MAX : So I understand.

CELIA : Is it true that you make it a rule to go to bed intoxicated every Tuesday and Friday ?

MAX : No, Celia ; every Tuesday and Thursday.

CELIA : And what about drugs ?

MAX : Er—Mondays and Wednesdays.

CELIA : Suppose we stop talking nonsense. Is there nothing better to talk about after twenty years ?

MAX : I never was a good talker.

CELIA : No, dear, but *I* was. Has nothing important happened to you in all this time, apart from what the newspapers record ?

MAX : Nothing that seems important to me now. Just a great deal of work.

CELIA : And a great many women ?

MAX (*soberly*) : A good many.

CELIA : Saturdays and Sundays, I suppose. What happened to Lili-Diane ?

MAX (*with a dim reminiscent smile*) : Lili-Diane ! I wonder.

CELIA : How long did *she* last ?

MAX : I forget. Three or four months, I think.

CELIA : Two months less than I ! Do you remember how I hated her ?

MAX : Did you ? I never knew. You never said a word against her.

CELIA : I was proud. But how I cried ! Day after day I cried. To be supplanted by a poor skinny little cocotte from the Batignolles !

MAX : Love's a painful occupation, isn't it ?

CELIA : It hurt *me* enough. Being in Paris then was like being among strangers at one's own funeral.

MAX : It shouldn't have hurt. Merely the law of reaction. You were curves, Lili-Diane was angles. Her successor was probably curves again.

CELIA : My dear, you were a man, not a pendulum.

MAX : I was neither ; I was an artist. Like Michael.

CELIA : Alas, like Michael. Have you seen his work ?

MAX : He left me a bundle of his best drawings to look at. I brought them back with me. They're upstairs.

CELIA : Are they good ?

He nods decidedly.

MAX : Tell him to lock every scribble safely away. They'll be worth money one day.

CELIA : Do you think he'll make his mark ?

MAX (*shrugging*) : You can't tell. He may run to

seed. But if he doesn't, he ought to be among the best.

CELIA : As good as you ?

MAX : Possibly better. Are you pleased ?

CELIA : No, Max. In twenty years I have acquired a sense of values.

MAX : Where have *you* been all the time ?

CELIA : Everywhere ; except England—and Paris. Vienna for the most part with a long bout of the watering-places. My lover was fond of gambling.

MAX : Your lover ?

CELIA : Prince Nicholas Khostov.

MAX : The fellow who died the other day ? But he was old, wasn't he ?

CELIA : He would not have liked it to be thought so.

MAX (*a little shocked*) : But, Celia, how could you ?

CELIA : A kept woman, my friend, is usually a woman who cannot keep herself. But I was not without compensations. Nicholas was a very amiable person, rather humourless, very kind and almost ostentatiously generous. Besides, I too, since we parted, have acquired in my own small way a little fame. (*Bitterly*) I used to play at the Big Tables.

MAX : How dreadful !

CELIA : And I have some most celebrated jewellery, which, as you might have read regularly in the continental *Daily Mail*, I used to wear with a distinction quite my own. Poor Lili-Diane would have envied me.

MAX : Celia, please ! Did you ask me here solely to shock me ?

CELIA : What did you suppose had become of me ?

MAX : My dear, I never thought. I thought of you

merely as you were in Paris. I believe I even visualized you only in the clothes of that day.

CELIA: You never thought of me with regret or self-reproach?

MAX: Certainly not; only with pleasure; in a sentimental glow. Should I regret my best six months? Paris was still a new fairyland, a city of adventure. I was a failure, but a light-hearted one. We were frequently hungry but always happy. We laughed easily, we loved well; ourselves, each other, and being alive. And we were young, young, young, young, young! Do you remember the little bric-a-brac shop off the Boulevard St. Michel—just opposite the Soufflet?

CELIA (*carried away with him*): Do I? I don't think so.

MAX: Yes; that little Venetian bowl he had there that we wanted so badly?

CELIA: I remember.

MAX: It was sixty francs and we refused to buy it for weeks. Then when we'd only forty-five francs between us, I went and bought it for you.

CELIA (*smiling*): And we starved for the next two days.

MAX: And so proud of it! A gesture for Art and Love! We had mortified our stomachs for our souls!

CELIA: A dangerous trick!

MAX: And at lunch-time all we had to put on the table was our Venetian bowl; symbol of love and beauty!

CELIA: Appropriately brittle!

MAX: Celia, shut your eyes.

She looks up at him quizzically, then does so. He

sits beside her and from the stretched, capacious pocket of his jacket, he produces the glass bowl and puts it in her hands. At the touch of it, she opens her eyes, contemplates it for a moment with silent, almost tender, recognition, and then looks up at him.

CELIA : Where did you get it ?

MAX : You forgot to pack it when we left the Mines.

CELIA : Left where ?

MAX : The Hotel des Mines. M. le patron didn't know *your* address, so he sent it on to me. I've kept it ever since.

She smiles and looks at it again.

CELIA : It's not as lovely as we thought, is it ?

He shakes his head.

MAX : Sixty francs was a robbery.

CELIA : At least we have the satisfaction of still owing the old gentleman fifteen.

MAX : On the contrary he made me pay him afterwards. Don't you remember—it was just before I sold my first picture ?

CELIA : I remember. To the American gentleman who was so pathetically anxious to take Paris home with him.

MAX : That's right. And don't you remember he wanted his money back when he learnt I wasn't a Frenchman ?

As they laugh happily at the recollection, the door opens and MR. BOTTLE *stands amazed to find them sitting side by side, arm in arm, hilarious.*

GEORGE : Celia !

MAX *rises.*

CELIA : Ah George, it's you. (*To* MAX) You remember my husband ?

MAX (*formally*) : How do you do ?

GEORGE (*with great dignity*) : Go to the devil.

CELIA : My dear, he did that years ago.

GEORGE : I propose to cut this interview as short as possible. Celia, kindly tell me as briefly as you can precisely what Mr. Lightly has to say for himself.

MAX : With regard to what ?

GEORGE : I asked my wife.

CELIA : With regard to Judy ? Well, to tell the truth we hadn't mentioned her yet.

GEORGE : Hadn't mentioned her !

MAX : You know what it is, meeting after twenty years.

GEORGE : I know nothing of the kind. All I know is that, not satisfied with my wife, you now must needs ensnare my daughter.

MAX : Oh, really, I was quite satisfied with your wife, but that was many years ago.

GEORGE : And let me tell you, sir, that it is only at my wife's special request that I refrain from punching you on the nose.

CELIA : Nonsense, George. What you do to each other's noses is no affair of mine.

MAX : My dear Mr. Bottle, if you had been punched on the nose by irritated fathers and husbands as often as I have, you would appreciate how enormously that simple act facilitates the process of seduction. Besides, with that end in view I make it a rule always to hit back ; provided of course that the aggressor is smaller than I.

GEORGE : Believe me, I am not intimidated.

CELIA : You're trying my patience, both of you. I haven't all the afternoon to waste. Give each other

one nice good smack, if you must, and then let's get to business like grown-up people. Shall I order tea?

GEORGE (*emphatically*): No, you shall not.

CELIA (*extremely business-like*): Very well then. Now. The situation is quite simple; you, Max, are attempting—and with every likelihood of success—to seduce our daughter. Personally I am against it. So also, I gather, is George. (GEORGE *stirs impatiently.*) Judy, on the other hand, is strongly in favour of it.

MAX: That makes two for and two against.

CELIA: Precisely. Now this is clearly not a case in which the device of a casting vote——

GEORGE (*bounding up angrily*): I will not sit here and cold-bloodedly discuss my daughter's virtue as though it were a—a—a piece of toffee! You two, I know, will willingly discuss anything, however disgusting, without a qualm. You, Celia, have always made a point of being calm and quiet whenever you had every right to be angry and make a noise; and equally you have always made a noise when you had no excuse for not being quiet. You, sir, are a low, filthy blackguard with whose habits I am proud to be unfamiliar. But—but——(*Then suddenly forgetting what he was leading to*) Where was I?

CELIA: You were expressing your disapproval of Max, dear.

GEORGE: Oh, yes. (*Then turning to* MAX) But you are to understand, once and for all, that the sum total of this loathsome interview is that I forbid you ever to see my daughter again. There!

MAX (*dreamily*): How history repeats itself! I can remember your using almost exactly the same words

in similar circumstances twenty years ago. Will it surprise you if the result is the same?

GEORGE: I have told you quite clearly what I expect.

MAX: You expect me to give up Judy for nothing, for the caprice of a third party? You do your daughter's charms less than justice.

GEORGE: Caprice! Third party! Caprice! My daughter's honour!

CELIA: No purpose will be served, George, by your lolloping about the room in vociferous indignation. You don't seem to realize that we are in a very awkward position.

GEORGE: *I* don't realize!

CELIA (*continuing steadily*): We want something done or, rather, prevented. We are faced with a problem which at present neither you nor I can see how to solve. There remains Max. It may be that *he* can suggest some solution.

GEORGE: He? Are you mad? He—he *is* the problem.

MAX: As a matter of fact a possible solution *has* just occurred to me.

CELIA: There you are.

GEORGE: I'm not at all sure that it would be right to listen.

CELIA: I shall listen. You may put your fingers in your ears. Now, Max.

MAX: Well, quite briefly my suggestion is that I should be bought off.

CELIA: George, how stupid of us! Why did we never think of that?

GEORGE: I'm going mad.

CELIA: But surely these days you have as much money as you want?

MAX: Not so very much, I assure you; and I'm extravagant. Besides every man has his price.

GEORGE (*stunned to the point of inarticulacy*): I—I am at a loss. I'm at a loss for words. Knavery I'm used to; I'm a business man. But *undisguised* knavery ought—ought not to be allowed.

MAX: But why all this talk of knavery? You, my dear Bottle, have a talent, I presume, for mathematical calculation and for being industrious. I have a talent for painting pictures and for making love. Not for a second would you consider employing your talents and experience gratis and for nothing. Why then should you expect me to do so with mine?

GEORGE: My daughter's honour, sir, cannot be bought and sold.

CELIA: You forget, George, however, that it can be stolen.

GEORGE: I forget nothing. I—— (*The door opens and* MICHAEL *comes in.*) What do *you* want?

MICHAEL: Judy told me that m-mother was here. (*Then seeing* MAX) Oh, I say; she didn't say you were here too. (*Beaming with admiration*) Awfully d-decent of you to come here; I expect you're frightfully busy. (*To* GEORGE) Red-letter day for the house of B-Bottle, eh, father?

GEORGE (*literally screaming*): Get out of here, you misbegotten little idiot, before I'm rude to you!

MICHAEL (*surprised*): Why, I'm sorry. (*Looking from one to the other*) Have I butted in on a meeting or something?

CELIA: It's all right, Michael. We were just discussing something rather important, that's all.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry. I'll clear off.

GEORGE (*suddenly*): No! (*Quietly*) That ass has given me an idea. Michael, go up and fetch your sister.

MICHAEL (*still slightly bewildered*): All right.

He goes.

CELIA: What are you going to do?

GEORGE: I am going to show this man to Judy in his true colours. If he won't give her up, perhaps *she* will not be quite so impervious to argument. She will be interested to hear of the businesslike offer he was frank enough to make just now. She may even be interested to learn, if necessary, that this is the man who enticed away her own mother. (*To* MAX) That, I dare say, is not a story you would care for her to hear.

MAX: Why not?

GEORGE: You see no reason? Yet you appear to have withheld it from her yourself.

MAX: My friend, a congenital philanderer has sufficient unforeseen worries without boasting indiscriminately of his conquests.

MICHAEL *returns with* JUDY.

JUDY: I didn't know you were coming, Max.

MAX: I didn't know myself until an hour ago.

JUDY: Have you introduced yourselves? (*Her eye falls on the glass bowl.*) Where did that come from? What an appalling thing!

GEORGE: Sit down, Judy. I have something to say to you. (*She does so and watches him expectantly.* MAX *fills a pipe.*) I have just learned of the—the relations between you and Mr. Lightly.

MICHAEL (*involuntarily but quietly*) : Oo, God !

GEORGE : Do you wish to pass an observation, Michael ?

MICHAEL : N-no.

GEORGE : Thank you. (*To* JUDY *again*) I am not surprised that you have kept the thing a secret, as you must have known exactly how I should regard it. I have appealed to Mr. Lightly's honour, but barking up *that* particular tree is merely to run one's head against a stone wall. That is why I have sent for you. I am going to ask you a simple question. Will you promise me faithfully never to see this man again ?

JUDY (*gravely*) : No, father.

GEORGE (*quietly threatening*) : I warn you, Judy ; you are unwise.

JUDY : I may be unwise, father, but I am also in love.

GEORGE : Judy, you are barely twenty-one, while I am old enough to be your father. Indeed I *am* your father. Couldn't it be that I'm a better judge of character than you ?

JUDY : I know Max, father.

GEORGE : I don't think you do. You force me to enlighten you. You may be interested to learn that your " lover " has just offered to give you up provided I make it worth his while—in cash.

MICHAEL *takes a step forward.*

JUDY (*after a little pause*) : I—I don't believe it.

GEORGE : I *thought* you didn't really know him.

JUDY : Max, it's not true, is it ?

MAX (*puffing comfortably at his pipe*) : Quite true, darling.

For a second she is silent ; and then, taking courage from the faint twinkle in his eye, she bursts out laughing.

GEORGE : What exactly is amusing you ?

JUDY : Why, isn't it funny ? Where's your sense of humour ? Max, you might have waited till I came. I wish I could have seen their faces. Mother, surely *you* must have seen the humorous side ?

CELIA : I'm afraid, my dear, Max didn't mean it altogether humorously.

JUDY *walks in moody silence across the room.*

JUDY : All right. I knew that already, really. I knew it wasn't a joke, but I hoped you'd let me keep up the pretence ; just to save my face, you see.

CELIA : I'm sorry.

GEORGE : I'm sorry to hurt you too. But I had to tell you ; to protect you from yourself.

She shakes her head.

JUDY : You haven't done it. I shan't give him up. I've known for ages that he doesn't love me as much as I love him. He couldn't. Nobody could. I—I worship every hair on his head. Humiliating, isn't it ? I can't help it—I shan't give him up. I'd give my eyes for him to love me more, but—but crumbs are better than nothing.

CELIA : You told me you were happy.

JUDY : So I am. Happy with my crumbs. Besides simply to love is good in itself ; thrillingly good. It's unselfish. It asks only to be allowed to give. (CELIA's *foot taps impatiently and* JUDY *notices.*) It's true, mother. Perhaps you've forgotten.

MICHAEL : Judy's right about l-love, you know.

GEORGE : You shut up ! Listen, Judy. I have not told you everything. I hoped it would not be necessary. I'm sorry, Celia, but what else am I to do ?

CELIA : Don't apologise ; I have no false modesty.

GEORGE : Yesterday, Judy, I was forced to tell you about your mother. Very well, then. The man who sneaked in like a thief in the night and stole my wife is sitting there.

JUDY (*when she can speak*) : Mother ! Is that true ? Was Max the man you ran away with ?

CELIA : He was.

MICHAEL, *whose mind is slower than his sister's, stands bewildered.*

JUDY (*going to* CELIA *enthusiastically*) : Oh, how marvellous ! I never knew. I thought it was just anybody, nobody. I don't know why. (GEORGE *is appalled at the unexpected effect of his pronouncement.*) Max, why did you never tell me ?

MAX : It never occurred to me that you would be interested.

CELIA : You forget that a gentleman does not repeat the names of his former mistresses.

JUDY : But how wonderful of you, mother ! He was poor and unknown then ; but *you* realized always that he was really great.

GEORGE : Judy, are you utterly shameless ?

JUDY : Shame ? Ashamed that my mother was one of the influences that have gone to the making of a great artist ? Ashamed that my mother could spot a great man ten years before the rest of the world ? Ashamed that my mother had courage, that my mother could love ?

CELIA (*quietly*) : Judy.

JUDY : Yes, mother.

CELIA : I'm afraid he's not a very nice man really. I can tell you a little more than your father. You said I have had a marvellous life. It is not very marvellous

year after year to go the round of all the smart casino towns, trailing at the side of a—an elderly casino prince. It is not very marvellous to grow old in a milieu of polite, well-ordered vulgarity and without sight of one's children, which perhaps is what an intelligent woman means by the Next Life. It is not even very marvellous to find oneself in a strange capital abandoned by one's lover after six months, when for his sake you have left behind the security of a kind, affectionate and wealthy husband.

MICHAEL (*very red in the face*) : Did that h-happen to you ?

CELIA : Yes, Michael, that happened to me. I'm sorry, Max, but I must use what weapons I can.

MAX (*rising, good-naturedly*) : Why, of course, my dear. All weapons are fair.

CELIA : Nor is it very marvellous to be penniless in Paris in November and to realize that your lover, having pawned your fur coat, has left you not a franc of the proceeds. (*Before anyone realises what has happened,* MICHAEL, *with a strange growl, has sprung at* MAX's *throat and is shaking him violently.* CELIA *is the first to recover. She has risen and, half amused, slaps her knee as she calls to him.*) Michael ! Bad boy ! Drop it !

MICHAEL *lets go and stands rather red and shame-faced looking from one to the other.*

MAX (*adjusting his clothes ; mildly*) : Damnation. And a clean collar too. I might have remembered how rough your tea-parties can be, Celia.

CELIA : George, what's the matter with *you ?* (*For* GEORGE, *pleased with* MICHAEL *for the first time in his life, stands, quite unconsciously, beaming and smoothing his moustache. At the sound of* CELIA's *voice, he recalls him-*

self and resumes his stern front.) Thank you, Michael. (*She presses his arm unobtrusively but affectionately.*) But unfortunately that still leaves us where we were.

GEORGE: Does it? Judy, you have heard what your mother has said. Do you still wish ever to speak to this man again?

JUDY (*steadily*): I told you, father; I love him.

GEORGE: But after what your mother has told you?

JUDY: I'm sorry I can't explain to you what love is.

CELIA (*contemptuously*): Love!

JUDY: *You* should need no explaining, mother.

CELIA (*with spirit*): I don't. I know what it's made of my life. I know what it can make of yours. I saw just now what it has done already. It can turn a cool, clear, self-respecting young woman into a poor, shivering, naked creature, maundering shamelessly over her crumbs.

GEORGE: Celia, steady!

JUDY: You were no less shameless about him once.

CELIA: I know, my dear, and that's what love did to *me*. I told myself I loved him for his very faults. Think of that! What could be more degraded than to love a body because it's diseased and disfigured? I refused to measure him by other men's standards at all.

JUDY: And you were right. Why have you forgotten it? He is not like other men. He's—an artist.

CELIA (*with enormous heat and sincerity*): Art and Love! Love and Art! God, when shall we have swept away those twin delusions? The two impregnable excuses of every malingerer that chooses to clog the wheels of Life. I tell you, my child, that one of George's drains is worth more than all the Rembrandts in the world, that one of Charlie Dawes' farm

labourers is worth more than the whole of Montparnasse with the Slade thrown in. And it's taken me half my life to find that out.

JUDY: You're judging art and artists by moral standards. You can't.

MAX (*mischievously*): Art for Art's sake, you know.

CELIA: But drains for God's sake. The glory of America is that she has no artists but the finest plumbers. She thinks it is her shame but, I tell you, it is her glory.

GEORGE: Celia, this is all rather improper and subversive. Everybody knows that Art is one of the most important things in life and Love is a very—er—very beautiful thing too.

CELIA: Max and I know better. For twenty years he's been a professional artist and I've been a professional lover. Tell them, Max; am I right?

MAX: You are right, my dear.

CELIA (*to* JUDY): Why do you suppose your father isn't as worthless as Max? It isn't accident. (*Very seriously*) It's because all his life he has been busy upon God's work; Max has been busy on his own.

JUDY: On his own! You don't understand, you don't *begin* to understand what a creative artist *is*.

CELIA (*striding up and down, carried away by the depth of her feeling*): Oh, that eternal cant about creative artists! (*With infinite contempt*) Creative artists; passive instruments that make a tune willy nilly in response to every wind that stirs them! Creative indeed? As passive as mirrors—mirrors to *real* life. And we conspire to praise and pet them instead of pitying them.

JUDY: And we are right. They're a race apart.

CELIA: As lepers are a race apart: a race apart with

a curse laid on them ; poor supine things that *feel* and *feel*, weaving pain into sunsets and beauty into women ; continually pricked that they may sing the better ; while healthier, stupider, holier men make lavatories.

GEORGE : Celia, you are just going out of your way to be shocking. What has all this to do with the point ?

CELIA : Everything.

GEORGE : Will it help to solve the problem ?

CELIA : Not in the slightest.

GEORGE : Then why in Heaven's name——

CELIA : Fifteen minutes ago you lost your temper and I didn't interfere. Be good enough not to interfere now that I have lost mine. I'm sick to death of the lot of you, of your shibboleths and tabus and your muddled heads. Max is the only one who can see the light and he turns his back on it. You follow the light, though you've no idea that you're doing so and your mind remains as dark as Africa. My blood is at fever heat. I could knock all your heads together. (*Her eyes light on the Venetian bowl. She strides deliberately to it and raises it aloft in her right hand.*) Do you see this bowl ? Do you see this bowl ? Max just now described it as a symbol of art and love. Didn't you, Max ?

MAX : Yes, dear ; are you going to smash it ?

CELIA : Yes, dear, I *am* going to smash it.

And with a magnificent gesture of one hand she pitches it over her shoulder right up to the ceiling. It crashes to the ground in fragments, whereat MRS. BOTTLE *seats herself violently on the chair behind her.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

The following Saturday afternoon.

The drawing-room at MR. BOTTLE'S *is a decent unimaginative well-to-do middle-class room, characteristic of the beginning of this century; that is to say before the popular renascence of old or quasi-old furniture. One has the impression—rightly—that no considerable re-arrangements or alterations have been effected for a quarter of a century.* CELIA, *entirely at home, but with a slight frown of disapproval, is busy titivating it; making mysterious, though effective, dispositions of flowers, cushions, etc.* GEORGE *comes in.*

CELIA (*without stopping*): Hallo, George.

GEORGE: Parsons told me you were here.

CELIA: I came about five minutes ago. Why are you back? You weren't expecting me?

GEORGE: No. (*Then he adds*) But I'm rather glad you're here.

CELIA (*with a suggestion of pleased surprise*): Thank you, George.

GEORGE (*not quite as self-confident as usual*): As a matter of fact I wanted to say something to you.

CELIA: What did you want to say to me?

GEORGE (*definitely uncomfortable*): I wanted to tell you that—that until last Saturday—you know—when that fellow was here—I never realized what a rotten life you've had. (*He waits.*)

CELIA : Yes, George ?

GEORGE : Well, that's what I wanted to say to you. (*His head is turned from her. She smiles, pats him gently on the shoulder, then returns to her flowers.*)

CELIA : It would have been nice if you'd answered my letter.

GEORGE (*ingenuously*) : How could I have answered your letter ? I'm not a good man, but after all one owes something to morality. Besides, I *did* ask my father. We used to talk about it almost every night till he fell asleep.

CELIA (*smiling*) : Never mind, George.

GEORGE (*simply*) : I mean one tries to do the right thing but sometimes it *is* so difficult to know.

CELIA : So it is. Do the children know you're in ?

GEORGE : No, I always go to the club on Saturdays. Marcus and Harrison and the others will be wondering where I've got to.

CELIA : Ring them up if you think they'll be anxious.

GEORGE (*taking it quite seriously*) : Oh, they won't be worrying. They're not the worrying kind. As a matter of fact I came home because I understood that girl would be here, that model.

CELIA : She is.

GEORGE : I thought I ought to see her. Something has got to be done.

CELIA : What do you propose to do ? Punch her on the nose ?

GEORGE : I propose to tell her exactly what I think of her ; and if she doesn't agree, I—I shall give her in charge. Does she suppose that I went to all the trouble of bringing Michael into the world simply to amuse *her ?*

CELIA : Excuse me, George, but it was I who went to all the trouble.

GEORGE : Well, we needn't argue about that. The point is something has to be done. If any little two-penny halfpenny adventuress thinks she can sneak off with one of my children from under my very nose without as much as a by-your-leave, she's very much mistaken. God knows Michael's nothing to write home about but at least he's too good for the likes of her.

CELIA : A poor thing but mine own.

GEORGE : Exactly.

CELIA : But be careful.

GEORGE : What do you mean ?

CELIA : I only mean that we haven't been particularly successful over Max. We don't want to bungle this too. (*There is an undecided tap on the door.* CELIA *and* GEORGE *wait.* *At length* CELIA *calls*) Come in.

Rather tentatively MISS SONIA TIPPET *comes in.*

SONIA (*to* CELIA) : Oh, I thought you were alone. (*To* GEORGE) Good afternoon.

GEORGE *ever so slightly inclines his head.*

CELIA (*kindly*) : Come and sit down. Did you want to speak to me ?

SONIA : Well, I did really.

CELIA : Do you mind my husband ?

SONIA (*uncertainly*) : No—er—no.

CELIA : He shan't interrupt.

SONIA : Very well. (*She sits down by* CELIA.) You see, it's about Michael. Well, you know how it is ; he wants to marry me.

GEORGE (*snorting*) : Marry you !

CELIA (*warningly*) : George.

SONIA : I mean Michael's ever such a nice boy and all that but— (*She falls silent.*)

CELIA : *I* like him.

SONIA : Well, you know what I mean. *I* don't want to marry *him*.

GEORGE : You don't !

SONIA : No. Of course I'm awfully sorry. But really I don't.

GEORGE (*injured*) : And why, may I ask, don't you ?

SONIA : Well, I'd really rather not say.

GEORGE : And I'd really rather you did.

SONIA : Well, I hope you won't mind. You see, my father's a baker. The Tippets have been bakers for nearly three hundred years. Mind you, I'm not a snob myself and I think Michael's ever such a nice boy, but after all the Bottles did make their money out of—well, didn't they ? I mean they're not really an old family.

GEORGE (*controlling himself with difficulty*) : Is that all you have to say ?

SONIA : Oh, no. I wouldn't mind that personally— I mean it *is* a democratic age, isn't it—though of course Dad would be furious ! (*To* CELIA) But you see there's the other thing ! I hate mentioning it. *You* know. I mean all that about you and—well, Mr. Lightly—— (GEORGE *jumps to his feet indignantly.*) You do understand, don't you ?

CELIA (*amused*) : Of course I do. Who better ?

SONIA : I mean our family has always been so very respectable. We've never been mixed up in anything like that. I mean I wouldn't say a word against Michael ; I think he's sweet. But—but, well, you see

he's only an artist when all's said and done ; I mean it's not even as if he had a proper job.

CELIA : I agree.

GEORGE : And why precisely should you object to his being an artist ?

CELIA : *You* have always objected, George.

GEORGE : I am his father ; this young lady is not. (*To* SONIA) Have you any further complaints ?

SONIA : Oh, you mustn't think I'm complaining. I wouldn't mind anything, if—well, you see I'm not really keen on Michael.

GEORGE : What do you mean ?

SONIA : Well, I like him awfully, but I'm not really keen on him. You know what I mean.

GEORGE (*snappily*) : I don't.

SONIA : Well, I don't, as you might say, love him. Of course I think he's ever such a nice boy, but——

GEORGE : You said that before.

SONIA : Of course I *have* been going out with him rather a lot this last week. I suppose that's how he got to thinking things. You know what I mean by thinking things.

CELIA : I know.

SONIA : I suppose I was wrong, but really I didn't quite know my own mind ; that is, until yesterday. I mean yesterday something happened.

CELIA : What happened yesterday ?

SONIA : Well, you see there's a boy I know called Ernie Figgins. He's a baker too. Well, him I am, as you might say, keen on. I have been really for months. You know how it is. Well, that's what happened yesterday.

CELIA : Mr. Figgins happened ?

SONIA : Yes. Of course I always knew he *liked* me. I mean one can always tell, don't you think ?

CELIA (*drily*) : I always think so.

SONIA : Of course it's an awfully good match for me. The Figgins's have been bakers nearly as long as we have. But you see I never thought he'd ask me ; really I never. I mean me being a model, and his mother so very old-fashioned and, as you might say, aristocratic. And of course they're ever so comfortable.

GEORGE : Comfortable ?

SONIA : *You* know ; well-off. I mean the Figgins's are multiple people.

CELIA : What is that ?

SONIA : You know ; they've got three or four shops. Anyhow why I came to you is because I don't really know how to tell Michael. It would be ever so sweet if you could help me.

CELIA : Of course I'll help you.

SONIA : You see Michael really does rather think things. I told him I liked him awfully and so I do, but I never meant no more than that. Really I never. And it *is* so hard to make Michael listen. You see, he *will* be so, you know, unhappy.

CELIA : Would you like me to have a word with him ?

SONIA : Oh, I wish you would. That's really what I meant. Do you think you would ?

CELIA : I will. (*She looks her up and down whimsically for a moment.*) I almost believe that through his disreputable parents, Michael has missed rather a good thing. (*She takes one of* SONIA'S *hands, and, smiling, pats it between her own two.*) Run along and send him to me.

SONIA : Thanks ever so.

Very much reassured she departs on her errand. GEORGE *is striding up and down ebullient with indignation.* CELIA, *after contemplating him for a second, cannot but burst out laughing.*

GEORGE : I see nothing in the situation that is the least bit amusing.

CELIA : Don't you, George dear ? You will one day.

GEORGE : I find it hard to believe that I shall ever be amused by the memory of my own son being elaborately snubbed by a baker's daughter who earns a livelihood by taking off her clothes and who furthermore labours under the fantastic, the imbecile name of Tippet.

CELIA : The young woman seemed to me to have a very great deal of sound commonsense.

GEORGE (*outraged*) : She refused to marry our son !

CELIA : That's what I was referring to.

MICHAEL *comes in.*

MICHAEL (*to* CELIA) : Sonia said you wanted to see me.

CELIA : Yes, Michael.

GEORGE : In short you have disgraced us once again !

CELIA : Rubbish, George. Listen, Michael. (*She makes room for* MICHAEL *who sits beside her.*) Sonia has just been talking to us.

MICHAEL : Did you like her ?

CELIA : Tremendously. She said you want to marry her.

MICHAEL : So I do.

CELIA : I'm afraid, Michael, you won't be able to.

MICHAEL : I'd like to know who can stop me !

CELIA : One person certainly can.

MICHAEL : Who ?

CELIA : Sonia.

MICHAEL (*with a suspicion of anger*) : What have you both been saying to her ?

CELIA : We said very little. It wasn't necessary. You see, Michael, she doesn't want to marry *you*.

MICHAEL : Oh, and why not ?

CELIA : She had several reasons. One of them was that you haven't a proper job. Painting she dismissed.

MICHAEL (*turning on* GEORGE, *who is looking out of the window with his back to them*) : That was father.

CELIA : On the contrary, your father, suddenly abandoning his principles, contradicted her.

GEORGE (*without turning*) : Well, damn it, I'm not a complete Philistine, even if you think I am.

CELIA : Aren't you, George ? That's a pity.

MICHAEL : What other reasons had she ?

CELIA : Her other chief stumbling-block seemed to her—wrongly, I think—more important. She doesn't love you, Michael.

MICHAEL : It's not t-true. She does.

CELIA : She likes you very much.

MICHAEL : I know. She t-told me so.

CELIA : She likes you but she loves a—a Mr. Ernie Figgins.

For a moment MICHAEL *is dumb, like a hurt animal.*

MICHAEL (*at length, very quietly*) : D-did she tell you so ?

CELIA : I'm afraid so, Michael.

MICHAEL : I—I want to hear it from Sonia.

CELIA : Where is she ?

MICHAEL : Downstairs with Judy.

CELIA : Wouldn't you rather see her alone ? (MICHAEL *nods vigorously, for words are not coming easily just now.*) I'll send her up to you. George, can you go and read the paper somewhere ?

CELIA leaves them. GEORGE, *conscious of* MICHAEL'S *pain, would like to do something consolatory, but does not know what. At length coughing and frowning self-consciously he pats him gauchely on the shoulder, but* MICHAEL *draws away.*

GEORGE : Buck up, old man. You know you—er —mustn't—er—well—er—— (*He coughs again.*) Er—buck up, old man.

And, quite glad to make his escape, he goes. Presently SONIA *appears. She is ill-at-ease and miserable for him.*

MICHAEL (*not looking up*) : H-hallo, Sonia.

SONIA : Hallo, Michael.

MICHAEL : We've—we've just been talking about you.

SONIA (*with a nervous smile*) : O-oh.

MICHAEL : My mother says you—you don't c-care for me.

SONIA : Oh, I do like you awfully ; honest I do.

MICHAEL (*his eyes still averted*) : But you don't really l-love me ?

SONIA : I don't know. At least I do know. I—don't know what to say. I mean I'd give anything not to hurt you, Michael.

MICHAEL : Mother says there's a chap called F-F-F—blast it !

SONIA (*miserably*) : Figgins ?

MICHAEL : Yes ; is there ?

SONIA : Well, I suppose there is really.

MICHAEL : Do you love *him ?*

SONIA : Oh, Michael, you shouldn't ask me.

MICHAEL : I'm sorry. I—I did rather want to know, that's all. You see, I do l-love you so frightfully.

SONIA : I'd like to tell you really but—but——

MICHAEL : But ?

SONIA : Well, I mean yesterday he asked me to marry him.

A long silence.

MICHAEL (*with difficulty*) : Are you going to ?

SONIA (*unreasonably ashamed*) : Well, of course I *did* say yes.

MICHAEL : I see. (*Then he adds*) Lucky d-devil.

SONIA : Oh, Michael, I am so miserable. (*She is near to tears.*)

MICHAEL : Life's f-funny, isn't it ? Only yesterday I was so happy. Just to think I've never even k-kissed you. Don't suppose I ever shall now.

SONIA (*wiping her eyes with a little handkerchief*) : You can now, if you like.

MICHAEL : I think I'd b-better not. Thanks awfully.

SONIA (*her lower lip quivering again*) : Oh, Michael, I wish you would. (*She sniffs painfully.*)

MICHAEL (*realizing for the first time how upset she is*) : My dear, there's nothing for *you* to be miserable about.

SONIA (*sobbing unrestrainedly now*) : I wish I was dead ! I wish I was dead !

MICHAEL (*surprised, but comforting*) : My dear, w-why ? *You've* done nothing. (*His arm is about her tenderly.*)

SONIA : I didn't want to hurt you, honest I didn't.

MICHAEL : Of course you didn't. There ; let me k-kiss you ; for the first and last time ; just to shew there's no ill-feeling.

She dries her face a little and, very woebegone, holds it up to Michael. He kisses her gently.

SONIA (*through her hiccoughs*) : Thanks ever so.

MICHAEL : There, do you feel better now ?

She nods and, still clinging to his hand, gets to her feet. There is a short silence.

SONIA (*at length*) : Well—well, I suppose I'd better go. (*Another awkward pause, while she twists her sodden handkerchief.*) I think you're ever such a dear really.

MICHAEL : Oh rot.

SONIA : I mean we can be, you know, friends still, can't we ?

MICHAEL (*biting his lip, but cheerfully*) : Of course we can.

SONIA (*after another pause*) : Well—well I suppose I'd better say good-bye.

MICHAEL (*with a wintry little laugh*) : I suppose so. Good-bye. Best luck.

SONIA : Good-bye.

And abruptly pressing her handkerchief to her nose again, she turns and goes.

For a moment he stands where she left him, then, strolling to the fire, he stares in dejection at the flames, which for him are a little blurred. He blows his nose vigorously. He meanders about the room. Presently he comes to a halt by his portfolio and, unthinking, falls to turning over the drawings one by one. Again he needs to blow his nose. Then he moves back to the fire with the drawings in his hand and slowly, wretchedly hands

them over, at first singly and at length several at once, to the blaze. He is standing in dumb contemplation of the flames when CELIA *comes back. She stops as soon as she realizes what he has done and for a moment does not break in on him.*

CELIA (*gently*): Been burning them, Michael? (MICHAEL, *without turning, nods, and* CELIA, *too tactful to go to him, seats herself quite near.*) Feel pretty bad, eh?

MICHAEL: Not too g-good.

CELIA: I know. I've had it.

MICHAEL: Over Lightly? That must have been rotten for you. (*He is still addressing the flames.*)

CELIA: Not too good. But fortunately heart-break's less like a chronic illness than a surgical operation; short, sharp pain, then a period of discomfort, then convalescence, then sound and healthy again.

MICHAEL: The short, sharp pain's quite—quite stiff, though, isn't it?

CELIA: Horrid, Michael. Poor Michael.

MICHAEL: How damn silly it all is.

CELIA: The people I admire most are the ones who arrive at the convalescent stage soonest.

MICHAEL: I'd like you to admire me.

CELIA: Set up a world record then.

MICHAEL: I expect I won't have done badly if I beat yours. How long did it take *you* to recover?

CELIA (*smiling*): I've forgotten. But I was quite good.

MICHAEL (*echoing her mood*): Anyone could tell that. (*He sits on the floor beside her, hugging his knees.*) I say, you were disappointed to find me going in for painting, weren't you?

CELIA: Yes, dear. That surprised you, didn't it?

MICHAEL: Well, I was surprised to hear it from you. I'm used to it from f-father of course.

CELIA: Your father's a pretty fine fellow, Michael; good solid useful stuff. It's the clever ones like you and me and Max that are liable to become mere waste material and litter.

MICHAEL: Liable to; but we needn't, need we?

CELIA: Certainly not.

MICHAEL: And you think painters are just waste material?

CELIA: People splashing importantly in a pretty backwater when there's plenty of use for them in the main stream. You see, artists aren't really creative like plumbers or preachers or farmers or philosophers. (*He smiles up at her.*) I'm being quite serious.

MICHAEL: I know. That was silly of me. It was the way you put it. You mean the object of drainage, when you really come down to it, is moral, while art is merely—merely, well, art.

CELIA: That's it, Michael. (*Smiling.*) Follow a drain to its source and you come upon the heart of man.

MICHAEL: By which you mean his—his incessant desire to p-put things a bit straighter?

CELIA: Yes, Michael.

MICHAEL: But don't you think that art also helps to put things a bit straighter? I mean—how shall I put it?—doesn't it, well, add something to consciousness, to self-knowledge?

CELIA: I think it does; a fraction. But is that quite an honest argument, Michael? Will you pretend

the backwater isn't stagnant because at one point it joins the main stream ?

MICHAEL (*scrupulously*) : No, I suppose not. I suppose really I'm only wriggling. You see, painting meant such a lot to me, it's all rather a jar at first.

CELIA : Of course, dear. But I think you're not short of courage.

MICHAEL : You'd rather I took up almost anything else.

CELIA : The world weighs heavy on our shoulders when they're not straining to roll it forward ; however infinitesimally.

MICHAEL : But just supposing—only for the sake of argument you know—that I had the m-makings of a really great artist in me, would you still advise me to chuck it ?

CELIA : Supposing, my dear, you had the makings of a really great contortionist in you, should I still advise you to chuck that ? If it's a choice between small-and-useful and great-and-useless, choose the first, Michael.

MICHAEL : I see. (*He gets to his feet and moves about the room thoughtfully.*)

CELIA : You've had a nasty day, darling, haven't you ?

He smiles a little wanly. And then GEORGE *comes in ; quietly, as though at a funeral.*

GEORGE (*in a shy, grave, funereal whisper*) : Hallo. (*Then he adds*) Can I come in ?

CELIA : Come in, George.

MICHAEL : Father.

GEORGE : Yes, old man.

MICHAEL : I've—I've just done rather a s-silly

melodramatic thing. I've burnt all my drawings ; or nearly all of them.

GEORGE (*appalled*) : Oh, dear ! Oh, dear ! Never mind ; don't you worry, old man. We'll do some more ; we'll do some more.

Then comes MICHAEL'S *nastiest moment of all.*

MICHAEL : I don't know if you've still got r-room for me in your business.

GEORGE : Why, of course I have, but——

MICHAEL : Well, I'd awfully like to come in, if you'll have me. (GEORGE *for a second is too surprised to utter.*) I'll work really hard and—and my d-drawing may come in useful, mayn't it ? (*He bites his lip to retain self-control.*)

GEORGE : But—but—but——

CELIA (*smiling*) : Yes, George ?

GEORGE : But what about your painting ?

MICHAEL : I've chucked that.

GEORGE : Michael ! What do you mean ? After all the money I've spent on Art Schools !

CELIA : Didn't you want him in your business, George ?

GEORGE : Yes, but—but everyone tells me his work is so good.

CELIA : So it is.

GEORGE : But it seems such a shame. Of course there's nothing I'd like better than that Michael should join me. I've wanted that for years.

MICHAEL : Do you still want it ?

GEORGE : Of course, but——

MICHAEL : Very well. I'll begin on M-Monday, if you like. (*He goes to the door.*)

CELIA (*kissing him as he passes*) : Good boy, Michael. Don't forget ; you're going to beat my record.

He smiles gratefully, nods jerkily and goes.

GEORGE : Of course I don't know if I'm on my head or my heels. I don't understand what's happened.

CELIA : Michael has decided to carry on the glorious tradition of Bottle ; that's all.

GEORGE : But why should he have changed his mind so suddenly ?

She shrugs happily.

CELIA : One thing and another. I had a little talk with him.

GEORGE : What did you say ?

CELIA : I told him, dear, that a sewer was the noblest work of man and a sanitary engineer the noblest work of God. Was that the bell ?

GEORGE : I think so. Are you expecting someone ?

CELIA : Yes.

GEORGE : Who ?

CELIA : Max.

GEORGE : What ?

CELIA : My dear, something's got to be done about him. (*She is standing by the door with a view to intercepting the parlourmaid in the passage on her way to answer the front door bell.*) Ah, Parsons. If that is Mr. Lightly show him into the dining-room and bring him in here when we ring.

PARSONS : Yes, madam.

She continues on her way.

GEORGE : But what are you going to do ?

CELIA (*cryptically*) : During the week I've been thinking.

GEORGE : But how did you persuade him to come here ?

CELIA : I wrote to him—quite truthfully—that we had been considering his recent suggestion and would he call to discuss the results of our deliberations.

JUDY, *in a towering rage, bursts into the room.*

JUDY : What's all this about Michael ?

CELIA : All what, Judy ?

JUDY : You know what I mean. About his joining father's business and chucking painting.

CELIA : Yes, it's quite true.

JUDY : And it's all your doing.

CELIA : And it's all my doing ; or nearly all.

JUDY : You've lived your life and now you want to come back and stop us living ours ! But you shan't. You may have spoiled Michael's life but you shan't spoil mine. Do you know what I'm going to do ? I'm going straight to Max. He loves me at least enough to take me out of all this.

GEORGE : Judy, how dare you talk to your mother like that.

JUDY : I've only told her the truth. I'm going straight to Max.

CELIA : I can save you the trouble, my dear. (*She rings the bell.*) Max is here.

JUDY (*rather deflated*) : What do you mean ?

CELIA : I sent for him. (PARSONS *appears.*) Will you show Mr. Lightly in, please.

PARSONS : Yes, madam.

All three wait in silence while the maid crosses the passage and returns with MAX.

Mr. Lightly.

CELIA (*amiably*) : Come in, Max.

She kisses him formally.

MAX : How are you ?

GEORGE : Celia !

CELIA : I'm sorry, dear ; habit is so strong.

MAX : Hallo, Judy.

JUDY : Hallo.

He waves lightly to GEORGE, *who merely bridles.*

CELIA : I'm sorry to have fetched you round here again but you will remember that we left the whole question of Judy in a rather undetermined state. Your last suggestion was that Judy should join you forthwith at—at—I forget where you live. Does that offer still hold ?

MAX : Why certainly.

CELIA : Is it a nice house ?

MAX : Small but, I believe, adequate.

CELIA : Hot and cold ?

MAX : Oh, yes.

CELIA : You think Judy would be comfortable ?

MAX : I'm sure of it.

CELIA : I remember you had a habit of jumping into the bath before I was awake, with the result that I was nearly always reduced to cold water. Do you still do that ?

MAX : Always, but my present supply of hot water is unfailing.

CELIA : Good. (*Unlike* GEORGE *and* JUDY, *they are both thoroughly enjoying themselves.*) You don't resent my asking these questions ?

MAX : Why should I ? You are very naturally interested in Judy's welfare.

CELIA : Dear Max, you make things so easy. Still I wish you'd chosen someone else's daughter.

MAX : I'm sorry ; but there—what can one do ? As ill-luck would have it, my last was curves and Judy is angles.

CELIA : Well, it can't be helped. Did you notice two small suit-cases in the hall as you came in ?

MAX : I think I did.

CELIA : They are Judy's. (JUDY *starts but says nothing.*) She has only to put her hat on, and she is ready for you. Look after her, my dear.

MAX : Oh, she can't possibly come to-day.

JUDY : Why not to-day ?

MAX : Why not to-day ? Well, the fact is I have some friends staying with me. There isn't room.

JUDY : When shall I come ?

MAX : In a few days' time ; as soon as I can get rid of them.

CELIA : Can't you get rid of them to-day, Max ?

He strolls across to CELIA, *a twinkle in his eye.*

MAX : You're a wicked, wicked woman, aren't you ?

CELIA (*grinning up at him*) : Have I called your bluff ?

He nods several times drily, then turns back to JUDY.

MAX : Your mother wins, Judy.

JUDY (*not easily*) : You mean you—don't want me ?

MAX : I want you very much. You see you're very beautiful. Who wouldn't want you ?

JUDY : Then—then why don't you take me ?

MAX : When I was younger, I *would* have taken you. You see, in those days I didn't bother about consequences.

JUDY : What are you afraid of ?

MAX : I should break your heart.

JUDY : You'll do that either way.

MAX : I'm afraid so ; but it would be even worse if you came to me.

JUDY : I don't see why. Why shouldn't it last for ever ?

MAX : Alas, for me no woman lasts for ever. I should make you as wretched as I made your mother.

JUDY (*in a loud strained voice*) : I don't care. It would be worth it.

MAX : Not for me. I'm not being unselfish, Judy. I'm thinking only of myself. I simply don't feel inclined to burden myself with your unhappiness.

JUDY : I shouldn't burden you with it.

MAX : They all say that, my dear.

JUDY (*near to tears*) : Why did you ever make love to me ?

MAX : Why do flowers open to the sun ? You were beautiful. When a fox-hound scents a fox, who shall restrain him ? The chase, the chase, the thrill of the chase ; but after the chase what an anti-climax is the kill ! Dull and shameful. It's the eternal problem : what shall we do with the body ? Solve that and all the huntsmen and philanderers in the world will be your debtors.

CELIA : What, as a rule, Max, do you do with the bodies ?

MAX : Sometimes I slink away and leave them—in Paris ; sometimes after a laborious course of artificial respiration I convert them into sisters. Unhappy man, I have more sisters than any other mother's son ! The world is cluttered with them.

JUDY : I shan't be one of them. I shall love you always.

MAX : Dear Judy. Why couldn't I at least have left you alone ?

He takes her hand but she withdraws it quickly.

JUDY : No, don't touch me ; please, don't touch me.

He shrugs.

MAX : I'm sorry. (*He goes to* CELIA.) Good-bye.

She is perfectly friendly.

CELIA : Good-bye.

She offers her hand.

MAX : It's strange how little you resent me.

CELIA : I don't resent you at all. I like you very much. Does one resent a lion because it bites ?

He presses her hand warmly and turns to go.

GEORGE : I hope, sir, you are satisfied with the figure you have cut.

MAX (*sincerely*) : My friend, I have long since ceased to care about what kind of a figure I cut. If I were an immoral man I should care very much. But I am worse ; I am unmoral. Alas, I am, as clever Celia has pointed out, a true, a great artist. My shamelessness does not deceive Celia ; for she—how blessed—is wise as well as good. It's merely that I have gone past shame ; below it. Am I right, Celia ?

CELIA : Yes, Max ; I think so.

MAX : Good-bye.

CELIA : Good-bye, dear. (*He goes. There is a short silence, then she adds*) You know, one can't get away from it ; he is a damned attractive man.

GEORGE : Attractive man indeed ! A damned high falutin' bounder !

JUDY : Don't let's talk about it any more. It wasn't very pleasant for me.

CELIA : I was rather proud of you.

JUDY (*with a bitter little laugh*) : *That's* funny. Whatever for ?

CELIA : I thought you were honest and dignified and brave ; that's all.

JUDY : For God's sake don't be nice to me or I shall cry now.

GEORGE : Oh, how I wish I'd punched that fellow on the nose !

JUDY (*laughing a little*) : That's better.

GEORGE : Unscrupulous bounder !

JUDY (*breaking out*) : Oh, please, stop talking about it ! Of course he's unscrupulous. Art *is* unscrupulous. It ought to be. It must be. Do you expect Max to conduct himself by the moral standards of the suburbs?

GEORGE : Perhaps if he had, he wouldn't have done this to you.

JUDY : He's done nothing to me. I'm all the richer for knowing him. He's not wrecked my life ; don't you think it. (*She is half-crying all the same.*) At least you can think what you like. I've had enough.

She goes to the door.

GEORGE : Where are you going ?

JUDY (*almost hysterically*) : I'm not going to do a Michael. I'm going down to the studio. I've got some work to finish before it's dark.

And she is gone.

CELIA : She's a good plucked 'un, that daughter of ours, isn't she ?

GEORGE : So she is. It's a damned shame.

CELIA : She'll be all right in a week or two. Let's thank our stars she's so well out of it. Have I done well, George ?

GEORGE (*doubtfully*): Well, of course you have . . .

CELIA: As a matter of fact, I told Charlie Dawes to call. I think perhaps that was a false step; at least premature.

GEORGE (*enthralled*): Why, do you think—do you think——?

CELIA: I'm not sure, but I hope so. (*At that moment* CHARLIE DAWES *comes in.*) Hallo, Mr. Dawes.

CHARLIE: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, sir.

GEORGE: Good afternoon, Dawes.

CELIA: You're early.

CHARLIE: Yes, I am a bit. I waited for Judy in the sort of studio.

CELIA: Have you seen her?

CHARLIE: Well, yes.

CELIA: What did she say?

CHARLIE: She said—well, she said—her exact words?

CELIA: If you like.

CHARLIE: Well, her exact words were "Get to hell out of here."

CELIA: Oh! Then perhaps you'd better. I thought that was a false step.

GEORGE: I say. I'm extremely sorry. The fact is Judy is a bit upset.

CHARLIE: Oh, that's all right.

CELIA: Never mind, Mr. Dawes. I'll phone you in a few days. Good-bye.

CHARLIE: Thanks awfully. Good-bye. Good-bye, sir.

GEORGE: Good-bye, my boy! And better luck next time. (*He laughs a shade uncomfortably, and* CHARLIE *goes.*) Well, that's that.

CELIA : Yes, George.

He takes a pace or two in silence.

GEORGE : Would you like some tea ?

CELIA : I think it's a little early.

He paces again.

GEORGE : Cigarette ?

CELIA : No, thank you, George. I don't smoke. (*A further short silence.*) By the way, George, those suit-cases in the hall belong to me.

GEORGE (*startled*) : What ? What do you mean ?

CELIA : Oh, I know they're only small ones but the rest of my luggage is being sent on later.

GEORGE (*horrified*) : Celia ! What do you mean ?

CELIA : Well, to tell the truth, I wasn't really comfortable at the Carlton.

GEORGE : Celia, I beg of you, be serious. Do you mean you propose to spend the night here ?

CELIA : I rather hoped all the rest of my nights here : and my days too. Don't you want me to ?

GEORGE : Certainly not—at least I do—I mean I don't know quite *what* to say.

CELIA : Make up your mind, George. It's not too late. I haven't definitely given up my room yet.

GEORGE : Well, this is all so sudden. Of course I would like to have you back. It's no good pretending I wouldn't. But would it be right ? I mean would it be moral ?

CELIA : To share a home with your own wife ?

GEORGE : Yes, but think of the circumstances. Upon my word I don't know what to say ? Do you *want* to come back ?

CELIA : Very much, George.

GEORGE : But would it be moral ? I mean—I mean do you love me ?

CELIA (*explosively*) : Heavens, man, haven't you had enough love for one afternoon ? Of course I don't love you ! I respect you, I like you, I admire you, I'm happy in your company ; but love you ? I wouldn't offer you the insult ! Do you seriously suppose that *you* love *me*, although you want me back ?

GEORGE : No, I suppose not exactly that.

CELIA : Very well then. Don't talk twaddle. If we at our age can find nothing solider and safer than love to found a home on, then for pity's sake don't let's try. We want to live together ; isn't that enough ?

GEORGE : Yes, but—(*very puzzled*) I don't know. I don't know, I'm sure. I wonder what Marcus and Harrison will have to say.

CELIA (*smiling*) : That's up to you, George. Well, which is it to be ?

GEORGE : Well, of course I'd like to. I'd like to enormously, but I don't know, I'm sure. (*He paces up and down pensively in silence. Suddenly he has an idea.*) Wait a minute. (*He goes to the telephone.*) Hallo . . . hallo, Kelvin 9922. . . . Thank you.

CELIA : What are you going to do ?

GEORGE : Hallo. . . . Is that Kelvin 9922 ? . . . Is that you, father ? . . . It's George speaking . . . I say, listen, father. . . .

AND THE CURTAIN FALLS

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